The Retrograde

Monday, November 03, 2025

UTD's official, independently-run student newspaper.

retrogradenews.com @retrograde_news

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Professors sue UTD over encampment arrest

The filing marks three total UTD faculty suing, claiming they were wrongfully arrested and alleging the school has committed retaliation and rights violations

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
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Editor's Note: *The Retrograde* is one of the plaintiffs on the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression's lawsuit challenging Senate Bill 2972.

Two UTD professors, arrested last spring while standing with students at a peaceful pro-Palestinian encampment, are now suing the university, the UT System, Gov. Greg Abbott and other state officials, alleging an ongoing campaign to violate their constitutional rights and punish them for their speech and actions.

The Muslim Legal Fund of America filed the federal lawsuit today on behalf of history professors Ben Wright and Rosemary Admiral. The suit alleges that despite breaking no laws and acting within the confines of all relevant university policy at the time, Wright and Admiral have experienced physical, emotional and professional harm as a result of the university's treatment of them during and after their arrests.

Wright is a tenured associate professor of history at UTD who has been with the university since 2015. Specializing in American history, his courses cover topics like the history of American religion, slavery in the U.S., the Civil War and Reconstruction. Wright said his current research has brought over $100,000 worth of external grants to UTD in recent years.

Admiral is a tenure-track assistant professor of history who has been at the university since 2018. Specializing in the Middle East, her courses cover topics like Middle Eastern women's history, the medieval Islamic world and the history of Islamic law. Admiral has previously participated in a Fulbright fellowship for research in Morocco. She said her next study abroad program was cancelled by UTD after her arrest.

The Retrograde reached out to UTD for comment and has not received a response as of publication.

The suit

The 29-page lawsuit, filed in the federal U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas, outlines in detail the professors' grievances — including their violent treatment on May 1, a severe lack of communication from university administration, broad restrictions on their campus life following the arrests and damage to their reputations from what the plaintiffs, Wright and Admiral, allege are knowingly false statements made by university and state officials. The complaint marks the first step of litigation, which the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression says could be a much longer process.

"When the students expressed fear at seeing a wall of law enforcement in riot gear coming toward their peaceful protest, our clients stood for the students and peacefully attempted to communicate," MLFA Civil Litigation Department Head Christina Jump said in a press release regarding the suit. "But Texas had ordered the opposite and wanted nothing to do with communication. Officials arrested these professors — who broke no laws — then unjustly interfered with their employment. These professors deserve our respect. Texas officials failed them. We hope the courts will not."

PHOTO BY RETROGRADE STAFF

Rosemary Admiral, in a blue hijab, surrounded by state troopers and police officers in riot gear.

The professors are asking the court to remove the unlawful restrictions imposed on them by the state and university policy, as well as compensation for the damages they have endured.

After their arrests, Wright and Admiral were released from Collin County Jail on the condition that they would be barred from UTD's campus except for teaching classes or engaging in "employment/research related activities." Wright said UTD did not provide clarification about what these conditions meant, and that he and his arrested colleagues were extremely limited in their activities. Admiral said that when she attempted to visit her office, she was told she could not do so unless she was accompanied by members of UTDPD.

Admiral also said she was provided an illegible copy of her court-ordered bond conditions and that she only saw the legible

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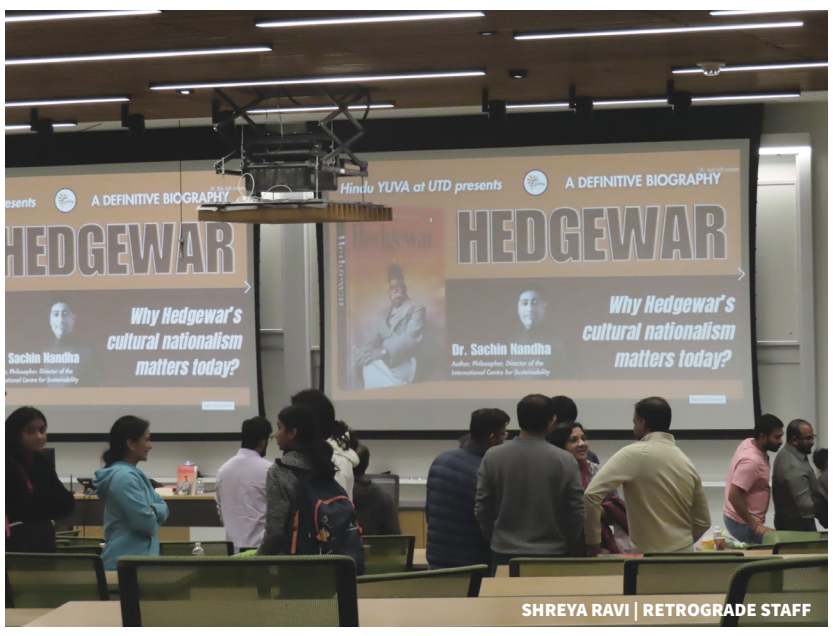

SHREYA RAVI | RETROGRADE STAFF

Hindu Yuva at UTD members met in the SCI building Oct. 30 for the presentation.

A facade of fraternity to hide Hindu fascism

A Hindu Yuva event on a nationalist icon blurs the line between faith and far-right politics, leaving minority students accusing UTD of double standards on speech

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

VARUN SARAVANAN
Retrograde Staff

"You can't take photos here."

The command from a Hindu Yuva officer to Retrograde photographer Shreya Ravi was more than a restriction; it was a symbol of the battle over narrative that defined an Oct. 30 guest lecture at UTD.

The event, featuring author Sachin Nandha and his biography of Indian political leader Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, presented a vision of "progressive conservatism." Yet it was met with fierce opposition from a coalition that labeled it an effort to "whitewash" a fascist leader, creating a stark divide between the story told inside the auditorium and the one contested in the hallways.

In addition to being an author, Nandha is a self-described philosopher, director of the International Centre for Sustainability, engineer and longtime businessman based in the United Kingdom. Nandha has spent the past few months on an international book tour for his most recent work, "Hedgewar: A Definitive Biography." UTD is the latest stop on this tour advertising the book and discussing Hedgewar, the founder of Indian paramilitary group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh — in English, the National Volunteer Corps.

Inside the auditorium, Nandha described Hedgewar as a man distinct from the descriptions of him created by his academic critics and his RSS supporters. Nandha says

SEE YUVA, PAGE 5

'THEY CAN SNATCH YOU OFF THE STREET'

International students at UTD and beyond are weighing their First Amendment rights against the fear of visa revocation and a $100,000 fee

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

Wadi, a spring 2025 computer information system graduate, was terrified when he first heard the news of the federal changes to the visa system and that 77 visas had already been revoked in North Texas, 19 of which were UTD students. An international student from Saudi Arabia, Wadi feared that his social media presence could get him deported — he purged his social media when The Retrograde first published news regarding revocations — and spoke with us only on the condition he could use a pseudonym instead of his real name.

International student panic re-emerged Sept.19 when the White House issued a new proclamation that would impose a $100,000 fee for individuals on H-1B visas seeking entry into the U.S. UTD said the next day that H-1B visa holders should return and quit travelling immediately.

This fear among international students is not unique to Wadi, nor is it unique to UTD. In August this year, the Stanford Daily sued the Trump administration on the grounds that their restrictions on free speech, exemplified in ICE's detainment of Mahmoud Khalil and Rumeysa Öztürk for their public statements in support of Palestine, were unconstitutional. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, a national free speech watchdog, said this created a shroud of "fear over millions of noncitizens, who worry that voicing the wrong opinion about America or Israel will result in deportation."

International students now must walk the delicate tightrope between maintaining their legal immigration status and understanding what rights they have to express themselves. The Retrograde spoke to legal experts in immigration law and free speech rights. David Swain is an immigration attorney in Dallas; his firm partners with the UTD Office of Immigrant and Citizenship Services to provide basic support to UTD students. Colin McDonnell is an attorney with FIRE currently fighting for the free speech rights of international students.

Practical advice from a lawyer

Throughout October, the Office of Immigrant and Citizenship Services hosted three attorney information sessions for over 1,000 students. Swain presented Oct. 13 to over 400 students concerned about H-1B visas.

Swain said that while the proclamation from the White House could be intimidating to students and staff on H-1B visas, the effects of the proclamation itself were negligible. Swain said that the most critical piece of information international students need to understand about it was that it only applied to individuals outside of the U.S. seeking to enter on an H-1B visa.

"If you're inside the United States, the employer does not have to pay the $100,000 fee," Swain said. "If you're in F-1 OPT, for example, and you get selected in the H-1B lottery, you can change status from F-1 to H-1B without paying the fee because that is not an entry."

> "Don't travel if you are on H-1B because we don't want any needless entry attempts"
>
> **— David Swain**

Swain said that he did not believe the rule would or could be enforced. The proclamation is set to expire September 2026 and it would only apply to visas that go into effect October 2026. Swain said that the proclamation was not written properly and was unlikely to have a legal effect on anyone.

"This happens to them all the time, you think they would learn," Swain said. "They're just too lazy to issue notice and comment regulations. I don't think that the $100,000 fee is in any of your futures."

Regardless of whether the proclamation can be enforced, Swain said that students on visas should not be internationally travelling now. Swain said every time students left the country, they risked their visa or entry being denied because of questions of non-immigrant intent. Swain said travelling needlessly risks the enforcement of legally dubious policies that are currently being enforced.

"Don't travel if you are on H-1B because we don't want any needless entry attempts," Swain said. "And don't travel while you're in F-1 status because, if you do run into any trouble outside the U.S., it's over. And there's literally nothing we can do about it."

Swain said that while concerns about visas could cause a lot of hysteria, students need to be more selective with their sources of information. Swain said his immigration law firm, Tidwell, Swain and Farquhar, provided free initial consultations to UTD students that need help. OICS partners with various law firms. Students interested in using this resource can contact OICS and fill out its legal referral application online.

"Try not to get your information from the internet if you can or your friends," Swain said. "They may be very good friends, but they're not good immigration lawyers."

Understanding your rights — and challenges to them

International student fears regarding expression have spiked this year. Dominic Coletti, the student press freedom program officer at FIRE, said his organization was getting more calls about how students could respond to Trump's crackdown on international students, but that the number of calls has calmed as people adapted to the new system. Josh Moore, the assistant director of the Student Press Law Center, said that his organization had seen a similar rise after the arrests of Khalil and Öztürk.

"Our legal hotline saw a flood of anxious questions from student journalists across the country," Moore said. "The week after we issued our Student Media Alert was our single busiest week in more than two years."

SEE IMMIGRATION, PAGE 3

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Polling Blotter

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 4. Registered voters in Collin and Dallas County are eligible to cast their ballot on campus in their respective location.

Apart from local school board, special and county-level elections, voters will be asked to consider approving 17 constitutional amendments for the state. Proposed amendments include funding for water infrastructure and colleges, bans and exemptions on taxation, parents rights, state judge reform and mandatory bail denial.

Student Government will host its annual "Party to the Polls," where students can be transported via golf cart to their respective voting location.

Voters in both Collin and Dallas County are not required to vote on campus or at their nearest center; instead, they may vote anywhere in their county, given both are approved to use Texas' Countywide Polling Place Program.

All polling locations statewide will be open 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. during Election Day.

Callier Center

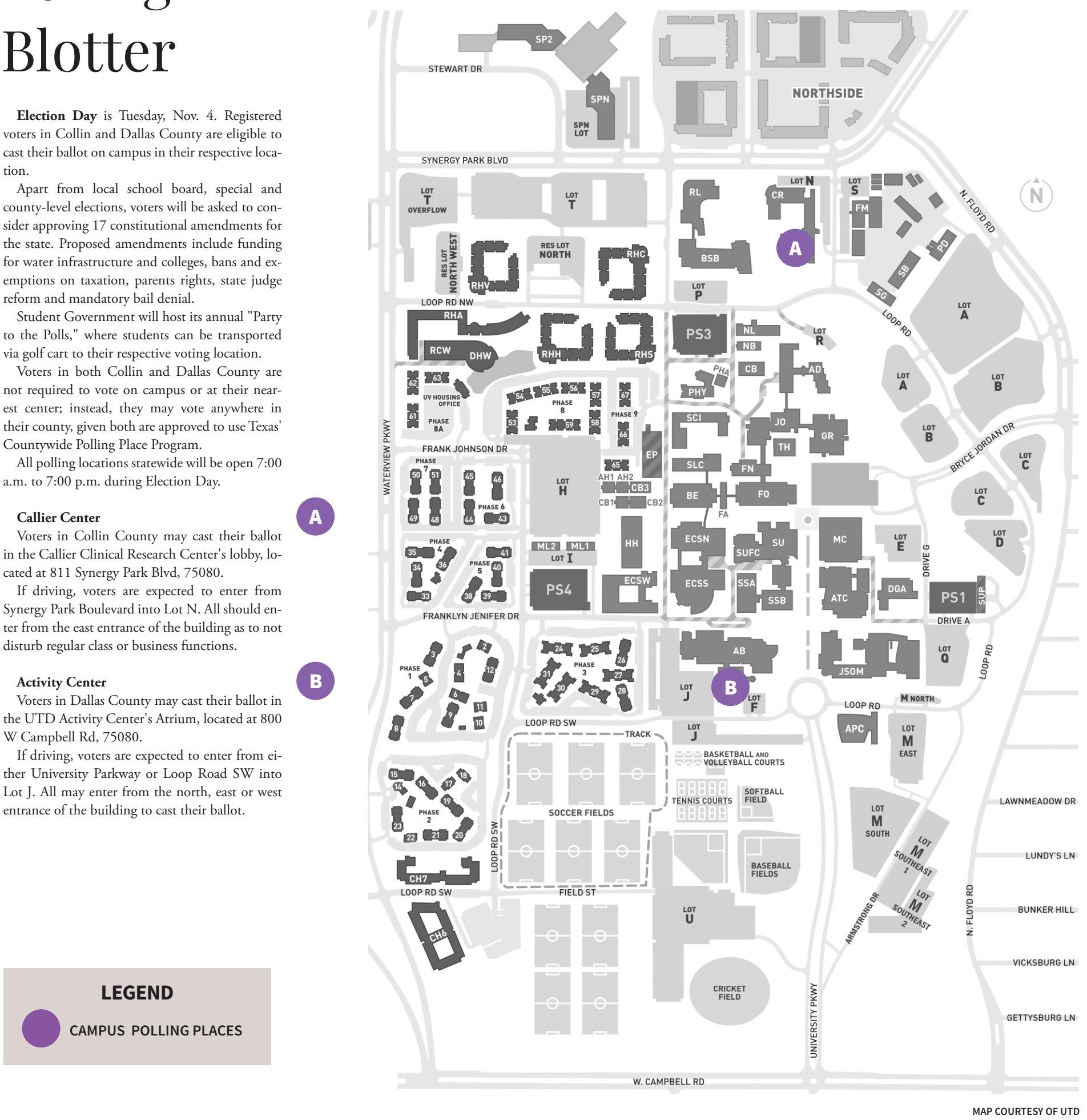
Voters in Collin County may cast their ballot in the Callier Clinical Research Center's lobby, located at 811 Synergy Park Blvd, 75080.

If driving, voters are expected to enter from Synergy Park Boulevard into Lot N. All should enter from the east entrance of the building as to not disturb regular class or business functions.

Activity Center

Voters in Dallas County may cast their ballot in the UTD Activity Center's Atrium, located at 800 W Campbell Rd, 75080.

If driving, voters are expected to enter from either University Parkway or Loop Road SW into Lot J. All may enter from the north, east or west entrance of the building to cast their ballot.



MAP COURTESY OF UTD

After six years, DART's UTD station debuts with a flourish

Following the Silver Line's inauguration last week, the on-campus light rail stop connects Comets throughout DFW

TYLER CRIVELLA
Assistant Managing Editor

The UTD Silver Line station opened today after six years in construction, connecting students to the DFW Airport, downtown Carrollton, malls and parks.

From Oct. 25 to Nov. 8, all riders can use the Silver Line free of charge. Students at UTD can additionally apply for free Dallas Area Rapid Transit passes through the Student Transit Pass system. Apart from servicing 10 stations, the Silver Line will connect students to the Red, Orange and Green lines.

"It's going to be great," DART Deputy Project Manager Ruben Landa said. "It gives students an opportunity to have access and be mobile around the entire region. It also conversely allows students around the region that want to go to college to have access to UTD."

The line's development has not been without struggle. When UTD officials held a groundbreaking for the light rail station on Sept. 19, 2019, the line was scheduled to be operational by 2023. However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought construction delays, moving back the opening to 2024. Following further permit delays, additional requests by city officials and taxpayer complaints, the line was pushed back to open in late 2025 or early 2026 — and held its ribbon-cutting ceremony last Thursday.

Despite its delays, UTD students have anticipated the station since the announcement of its construction. Biochemistry senior Harison Sakura, vice president of Comets for Better Transit — one of the largest activism groups on campus since 2021 — said the potential impacts of the rail station could change the university and region's economy.

"The opening of the Silver Line allows a lot of people to access housing not on campus, which broadens the housing market," Sakura said. "It also allows on-campus students to access retail areas. I'm personally looking forward to the Plano area stores."

DART will host celebratory activities from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. today, coinciding with service beginning. Silver Line stations will offer food trucks, tours of trains, live music and art installations. Landa said UTD students and local residents are encouraged to participate in the festivities.

"We've been working with UTD many, many times over the last six years and this is the climax," Landa said. "An opportunity to be mobile gives opportunities for jobs, opportunities for education and opportunities to be one with their community, and that's what I love about it."

TYLER CRIVELLA | RETROGRADE STAFF

The new station is the first of multiple public transit projects coming to UTD and its surroundings. The North Central Texas Council of Governments plans to construct a bike path following the route of the Silver Line. Landa said the entire DART system will be modernized, with hundreds of new buses and retrofitting of old stations. Development Project Communications Manager Mario Zavala said the Silver Line will run a 60-train schedule with more trains during peak hours, which may change as students demonstrate demand.

"One thing DART is really good about is that we're constantly monitoring our numbers and then adjusting schedules as we see fit," Zavala said. "We're trying to meet your needs."

‘THE FIRST AMENDMENT DOES NOT HAVE A BEDTIME OF 10 P.M.’

Setback for Texas lawmakers as federal court blocks “likely unconstitutional” law across the entire UT system after student groups file suit

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

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Assistant Managing Editor

Editor’s Note: The Retrograde is one of the plaintiffs in this lawsuit. This article was originally published Oct. 14 on the Retrograde website.

A federal judge in Austin blocked the UT System from enforcing key parts of Senate Bill 2972 today, a new state law that restricts student speech and protests on campus. The preliminary injunction is a significant step towards protecting the First Amendment rights of Texas students and a setback in the Texas legislature’s crackdown on university expression and student protest.

SB 2972, which took effect Sept. 1 this year, limits expressive activities — defined as all non-commercial activity protected by the First Amendment — on college campuses in multiple unprecedented ways. This includes a ban on expressive activities between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m. and on multiple activities, such as bringing a guest speaker to campus, using a drum or using a sound-amplifying device during the last two weeks of a semester. The law requires that all public universities update their campus speech and expression policies by Sept. 1 this year to comply with the new restrictions.

The court’s injunction, however, prevents the UT System and its constituent schools from enforcing the invited speaker ban, the amplified sound ban, the drum ban and the overnight expression ban that the law dictates on their campuses.

In his 52-page ruling, Senior U.S. District Judge David Alan Ezra found that the plaintiffs challenging the law, represented by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, are likely to succeed in proving the law and its accompanying university policies violate the First Amendment. The defendant’s lawyers argued the restrictions imposed in accordance with SB 2972 are meant to maintain order on college campuses in the wake of spring 2024’s student protests, per the stated intent of the law’s author and supporters in the legislature. Ezra wrote in his ruling that the law appears to be “content-based” and raises “significant First Amendment issues” by giving university administrators the discretionary ability to determine what is and is not “disruptive.”

“The First Amendment does not have a bedtime of 10:00 p.m,” Ezra wrote.

FIRE challenged the law and the accompanying policy created at UT Austin and UTD to comply with it on the grounds that it is a major threat to students’ First Amendment rights.

“Today’s ruling is a victory not only for our plaintiffs, but all of those who express themselves on college campuses across Texas,” FIRE’s senior supervising attorney JT Morris said. “The First Amendment protects their freedom of speech on campus, every hour of the day, every week of the year."

Ezra wrote that it can’t be in the public interest for universities to enforce a regulation that violates federal law in the name of adhering to state law, and that universities being unable to enforce SB 2972 does not harm them. Additionally, the Court found the public way Gov. Greg Abbott and state lawmakers — like SB 2972 author Sen. Brandon Creighton — responded to student protests in the past two years is unquestionably intertwined with the reasoning behind creating this “likely unconstitutional” law.

> “Texas lawmakers trying to muzzle campus protests have just passed one of the most ridiculous anti-speech laws in the country”
>
> **— Caitlin Vogus**

“The strong reaction indicates that the statute was because of disagreement with the message the speech conveys. As such, the statue is content-based both on its face and by looking to the purpose and justification for the law,” Ezra wrote.

The law’s opponents, including the American Civil Liberties Union, the Council on American Islamic Relations and Texan legal experts have criticized SB 2972 for its overly broad, chilling and unconstitutional effects since it was first proposed as legislation.

“Texas lawmakers trying to muzzle campus protests have just passed one of the most ridiculous anti-speech laws in the country,” First Amendment lawyer Caitlin Vogus and UT law student Jimena Pinzon said in a Houston Chronicle op-ed earlier this year. “Senate Bill 2972 would ban speech at night — from study groups to newspaper reporting — at public universities in the state.”

The ruling highlights the ongoing legal and political struggle over free speech on college campuses, an issue the state and federal government have become increasingly involved with this past year, as seen with the passage of SB 2972 and SB 37, which disempowers faculty senates, and the White House’s preferential funding plan for colleges.

Similar injunctions have previously been issued by federal courts; two such cases were highlighted in Ezra’s ruling. In May this year, the U.S. District Court in the Southern District of Indiana issued an injunction against Indiana University’s policy that strictly limited overnight protests on campus from the hours of 11 p.m. to 6 a.m., and in October of last year, the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland held that the University of Maryland could not ban all student organizations from holding events on a specific day.

The ruling does not strike down the law or its associated policies; however, it does prevent the law’s enforcement in the UT System as the case continues. Other public university systems in Texas are not impacted by the injunction and are still required to enforce SB 2972. The defendants being sued in this case include the UT System Chancellor, the UT System Board of Regents and the presidents of UT and UTD.

The injunction still allows the UT System’s governing board to designate what areas on its campuses are public forums for expression, which limits what spaces can be used for student activities and protests. Additionally, universities may still ask for identification from anyone on campus and remove non-students from their grounds, and individuals are still banned from wearing face coverings to obstruct identification or make law enforcement’s jobs harder.

To read the rest of this story, visit retrogradenews.com

Dallas Trinity FC and the future of women’s sports

FC Dallas Trinity's Allie Thornton and Sealy Strawn could be underdogs in Dallas’ sports world, they say, but women’s sports are on a meteoric rise

KRISH GANDHI
Retrograde Staff

FC Dallas Trinity of the women’s Gainbridge Super League made history Oct. 18 in an international exhibition match against Mexico’s Club América Femenil of the Liga MX Femenil.

Dubbed the 2025 State Fair Clásico, the match was held at the iconic Cotton Bowl in Dallas toward the end of the Texas State Fair. It shattered records, drawing a Texas women’s sports record of 22,838 fans and marking a massive milestone for the sport in the U.S.

“I think that’s the biggest crowd I’ve ever played in front of,” Allie Thornton, Trinity’s leading goal scorer this year, said. “Just the energy you got from the crowd, it had an immediate effect on me. My mood was high, my energy was high, it's hard to go out there and not play to your top capacity.”

Trinity held its own for much of the first half, but the more established Club América side took control in the final 11 minutes before halftime, scoring three quick goals. Dallas Trinity got on the board in the 70th minute when academy forward Sealy Strawn headed in a cross from Camryn Lancaster, but the final score stood at 3-1 for Club América.

“It was such an honor to play in front of a crowd that big,” Strawn said. “It’s like instinct kind of kicks in, you’re in that moment and you don’t really recognize anything else around you, like the crowd disappeared, the players around me kind of disappeared, and all I was really focused on was at least getting contact on the ball. As soon as I saw it go in, the excitement that hit me was unbelievable.”

This was the franchise's second major international exhibition, following a match against the renowned FC Barcelona women’s team last season.

“It’s tough to compare to Barcelona, that experience was special because not a lot of people can say they’ve played against the best team in the world,” Thornton said. “I feel like where Club América differed was [that] we knew we could compete with them.”

The creation of the Gainbridge Super League and Dallas Trinity has opened new opportunities for young athletes to experience professional soccer at home. For players like Strawn who grew up in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, this is particularly meaningful.

“When I was younger, you never really got that in Dallas,” Strawn said. “It’s been an honor, because I know there’s so many young girls here that get the ability to come watch us play in Dallas and in their home environment.”

Thornton emphasized how these international exhibitions provide a global stage without the need to travel thousands of miles abroad.

Alongside this, Thornton talked about how the ability to have these international exhibitions with clubs like Barcelona and Club América allows for that “international taste” to be satisfied without having to play thousands of miles away.

“I played five years in Europe and that was great,” Thornton said. “But it’s like, now I’m kind of homesick, and it put me in the position of ‘do I want to keep playing or do I want to go back home’ because at the time there wasn’t really an opportunity for me to do both. And then Trinity comes about, and it’s like ‘OK, now I don’t have to choose because this team has provided the opportu- nity for girls to do this and now they have more options.’”

Dallas Trinity currently sits at 6th in the Gainbridge Super League standings as of Oct. 30, with both players admitting the season has been more up and down than they’d want, but the team continues to have much higher aspirations.

“I wanna win a championship,” Thornton said. “There’s always gonna be ups and downs, we’ve learned a lot as a team and we’ve grown a lot stronger and closer through it, it’s all about staying consistent and just focusing on the grind and giving that to life that trophy at the last game.”

As Dallas Trinity continues to build a reputation for itself, the future is bright in the world of women’s sports in America and Dallas. For example, the Women’s National Basketball Association is continuing to grow, and their Dallas Wings recently drafted a star in Paige Bueckers.

“Watching the women’s sports world right now, it’s awesome,” Thornton said. “I feel so proud to be a woman in this era we are in because this emphasis on women’s sports, it’s no longer a moment, it’s a movement.”

FC Dallas Trinity — and the Super League as a whole — will look to build on their successful start, using events like the State Fair Clásico to build popularity and grab an important foothold in the sports world. The league has already improved greatly from its inaugural season, with more great things to come.

“I think [the Clásico] was such a cool opportunity to put our stamp on the city,” Thornton said. “Because we’re in a very competitive sports market, it would be easy for us to sit back and exist in this market, but we want to thrive here. We want the same legacy and support and fans that these bigger clubs that have been around get, so I think this was a great opportunity to say we’re here, we’re here to stay, and we’re here to thrive. And there’s no reason we can’t be.”

PHOTOS COURTESY | CODY GRUBBBS & DALLAS TRINITY FC

Retrograde earns national courage award

The Reveille Seven Courage in Student Journalism award honors *The Retrograde* for committing to fight for a free student press.

PHOTO BY TYLER CRIVELLA | RETROGRADE STAFF

MUAAZ ABED
Retrograde Staff

The Retrograde received the prestigious Reveille Seven Courage in Student Journalism Award from the Student Press Law Center at the 2025 MediaFest conference in Washington, D.C. The award honors the publication's commitment to defending student press freedom in the face of adversity and includes a $2,000 prize.

The award was presented in partnership with the Associated Collegiate Press, College Media Association and Society of Professional Journalists. The cash prize was sponsored by the LSU Manship School of Mass Communication, the award recognizes *The Retrograde's* efforts to uphold a free student press. The SPLC, a non-profit dedicated to protecting student journalists' rights, has presented the courage award since 2001.

The Retrograde won the Student Press Law Center’s Reveille Seven Courage in Student Journalism Award on Oct. 18 at the 2025 MediaFest conference in Washington D.C.

The Courage in Student Journalism Award is one of two major SPLC categories, alongside the Student Freedom of Information Award, which honors the use of public records to foster transparency in communities.

IMMIGRATION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

McDonnell said that the Stanford Daily’s lawsuit had the goal of reaffirming First Amendment protections for non-citizens who currently fear deportation and visa revocations over their protected speech.

"The government's position is that if two people are expressing the exact same point of view, if one is a citizen, First Amendment rights apply, but if one is not a citizen, then federal agents can snatch that person off the street and start deportation proceedings," McDonnell said.

McDonnell said the systematic attack on the speech of international students caused a very understandable fear for thousands of students across the country. He said students would be terrified to speak up in class, to share their opinion on a test or write their opinion in the student newspaper because each of these actions carried a tangible risk if the government continued to egregiously violate the rights of non-citizens.

McDonnell said FIRE is currently seeking an injunction against the federal government to stop the enforcement of what it sees as unconstitutional regulations. He said that for the time being, international students should exercise caution and avoid travel since they have the most constitutional protections when they are on U.S. soil.

McDonnell said that the First Amendment protects international students, and challenges to previous detainments have seen some success already. If successful, the lawsuit would bring U.S. policy toward international students back in line with what the constitution says.

"The First Amendment protects international students,” McDonnell said. “It doesn't say, 'Only citizens have an individual right to free speech.' It speaks more broadly: 'The government shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech,' and that applies whether you're a citizen or non-citizen."

SNAP uncertainty risks student hunger

Despite a federal judge's order, government shutdown pauses SNAP benefits while emergency funding remains uncertain

TYLER CRIVELLA
Assistant Managing Editor

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, benefits for low-income individuals were not released on Nov. 1 as the ongoing government shutdown has resulted in the temporarily halting of federally-funded programs.

In a ruling made Friday, Oct. 31, a federal judge ordered the federal government to use SNAP contingency funds — budget saved for emergencies — by Wednesday, Nov. 5. However, the ruling has left SNAP users in limbo. Gina Plata-Nino, interim director of the Food Research and Action Center, said it was uncertain how quickly the Trump administration would follow through on the judge's orders..

"While these rulings mark significant progress, they do not immediately resolve the crisis," Plata-ino said. "The process of getting benefits into recipients' accounts will still take time, and it remains unclear how quickly the Administration will comply. "

The funds will not be enough for regular benefits, though, as the $5.3 billion stored is less than the $8 billion required to sustain the entire program. Students reliant on SNAP will thus have partial or no benefits until a permanent solution can be found.

Students seeking food assistance while benefits are not available may find aid on campus from the Comet Cupboard, which operates during business hours on weekdays, or the UTDPD, which offers an emergency food bag when the Comet Cupboard is closed. Additionally, students can access off-campus food pantries, at various off campus locations.

TYLER CRIVELLA | RETROGRADE STAFF
UTD Comet Cupboard's partially empty sheleves with cans of food for students on the week of Oct. 27, 2025.

Out of Texas' 1.5 million college students, 240,000 are enrolled on SNAP. Though exact data on UTD SNAP enrollment is private, according to the UTD Basic Needs Report, last updated in Spring 2024, 35% of UTD students could not afford to eat a balanced meal and 24% of students said they ran out of food in the past month and could not afford to buy more.

In preparation for the expected increase in need, nearby pantries are increasing supplies. Director of Local Good Pantry Tracy Parlin said the potential dissolution of SNAP benefits will hit students especially hard since they already have the stress of classes and oftentimes a new environment.

"With SNAP ending, people will have to make really hard choices," Parlin said. "Especially for students, they need to have a healthy meal in their body. Without food, it affects their whole being: health, spirit, everything."

Across 12 counties, the North Texas Food Bank serves 40,000 unpaid federal workers and now 460,000 individuals on SNAP who may be looking for assistance. Even with the potential increase in need, Director of Communication from North Texas Food Bank Jeff Smith said NTFB is prepared.

"We're certainly prepared to serve the appropriate support," Smith said. "We're not equipped to [continue] that long-term. The concern is if this continues for several weeks."

While past government shutdowns have extended SNAP benefits, even when other federally-funded programs were halted, this shutdown may be different. This shutdown is on track to become the longest shutdown on record. Even with the use of contingency funds, as ordered by the federal judge, SNAP will not be able to survive through December should the shutdown continue.

College students face increased hurdles to enrol in SNAPl, such as ineligibility based on meal plans, leading to an underusage of the SNAP program as only 40% of eligible students are actively enrolled. Students may check their eligibility through the Student Basic Needs Coalition.

In a public statement, the Texas Department of Health and Human Services said that individuals still needing help with food can call 2-1-1. After selecting a language, users should dial 1 for community-based resources.

"One of the largest reasons students drop out is food related," Smith said. "They're getting housing and tuition but food isn't covered. Anyone that finds themselves impacted by food insecurity should find the nearest distribution centers near them."

This is a breaking news story. The Retrograde will provide more details as new information emerges.

'My story was stolen from me and buried'

Data shows the university investigates and sanctions sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination at a rate far below peer institutions across the nation, suggesting a system survivors avoid or one that fails to act effectively

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
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When supply chain management senior Zaina Asad reported a sexual assault to UTD's Title IX office in her freshman year, she said she was met with reassuring words: "We believe you. We support you. We are here to get you justice."

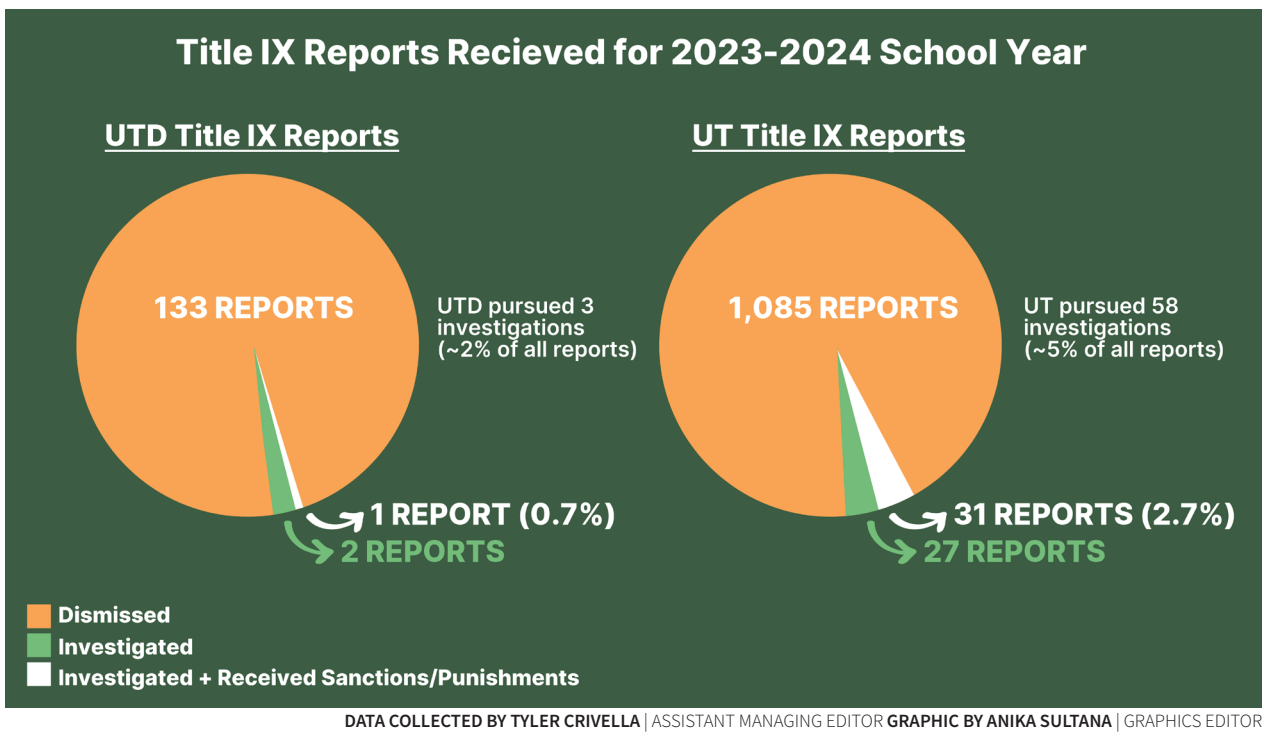
But over the next eight months, Asad said she encountered a very different reality: a lack of clarity, lengthy delays and a seven-hour formal hearing where she felt the Title IX administrators just wanted to brush her under the rug instead of helping her. When the final determination was made, Asad said she was asked to sign a document to prevent her from publicly discussing the details of her case. What started out as a journey to find justice ended with what Asad said was the complete "loss of [her] story."

Asad's story is emblematic of a broader, data-driven anomaly at UTD: a dramatically low rate of reported sexual misconduct and an even lower rate of investigations and sanctions when compared to peer institutions, suggesting a system that survivors may be avoiding or one that fails to act in the first place.

Sexual violence is not unique to UTD. The Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network has reported that college campuses present unique dynamics that can increase the risk of sexual violence — as of 2025, 13% of all students experience rape or sexual assault on campus, with an increased rate of 26.4% for female undergraduate students specifically. One in four female undergraduates will experience sexual assault while in college.

"It's very important to call out all the faults," Asad said. "But alongside those, I think we need to start getting more attention to what we can do to support those who are going through this. If that is not through Title IX, what can the campus do?"

Asad said she co-founded Crissa's Community Outreach in August 2023 to advocate for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and to provide crucial information and support to vulnerable students. Asad said CCO seeks to support students through what can be a highly technical, vulnerable and confusing experience. After it was founded, CCO conducted an anonymous survey of UTD students who had survived sexual assault and used those experiences to create the 20-page "What I Wish I Knew About Title IX" guide, which explains the Title IX process at UTD from the perspective of a survivor.



DATA COLLECTED BY TYLER CRIVELLA | ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR GRAPHIC BY ANIKA SULTANA | GRAPHICS EDITOR

What is Title IX?

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities that receive any federal funding. Institutions covered by the law, including state universities and public schools, are required to enforce Title IX's nondiscrimination mandate.

The types of discrimination covered under Title IX, according to the U.S. Department of Education, include: sex-based harassment, sexual violence, pregnancy discrimination, failure to provide equal athletic opportunity, sex-based discrimination in a school's STEM courses and programs, discriminatory application of dress code policies and/or enforcement and retaliation.

Alongside Title IX's nondiscrimination mandate, UTD's sexual misconduct policy, UTDBP3102, prohibits sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, sex-based harassment, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking and "other inappropriate sexual conduct."

> "If we can't help victims through Title IX, then we need to ask what as the campus do can to help victims."
>
> **— Zaina Asad**

The Office of Institutional Compliance is responsible for responding to and investigating allegations of sexual misconduct under UTDBP3102. The Retrograde reached out to UTD's Title IX office to gather insight on the process behind filing a complaint and the steps that come after. As of publication, UTD did not respond for comment.

According to the OIC website's information on how to file a complaint, the process begins with filing an incident report with OIC after experiencing conduct prohibited under UTD's Sexual Misconduct Policy, which begins the formal grievance process. Filling out and submitting a report form, however, does not constitute a formal complaint and will not immediately start the investigation process. Submitting an incident report is the starting point for the formal complaint process. Reporting means alerting the institution of an incident that needs to be addressed, whereas filing a complaint is a specific account of prohibited conduct that will initiate the applicable grievance process. After submitting an incident report, OIC will reach out to the complainant and set up a meeting to gather additional information along with explaining resolution procedures. It's during this meeting that the complainant will decide if they'd like to pursue a formal complaint or not.

As part of UTD's student code of conduct, UTDPP5003, faculty, staff and students selected from the school's discipline committee serve on hearing panels which, alongside a hearing officer, can listen to complaints and make final determinations on an incident. These incidents can range from academic dishonesty cases to Title IX complaints. Asad said that in her hearing, an off-campus lawyer from the firm Thompson and Horton was hired to evaluate the case instead of the UTD-based panel the policy provides, and that this kind of outsourced hearing officer process was not unusual in the replies CCO received to their survey.

The specific hearing details and reports from cases of sexual violence on campus are not public information. The Retrograde spoke to a former member of the discipline committee who served on various hearing panels during their multi-year tenure, who wishes to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation.

The former committee member, who heard roughly four Title IX cases over the span of a decade, said the majority of their work on the committee involved academic dishonesty and similar scholastic matters. They noted that only a small, static group of the broader committee received the in-depth and specialized training required to handle sensitive cases like sexual assaults, and that after the initial session, no further training was provided. The former member said they always felt strange about how low the standards were in the panel hearings when compared to legal processes.

"It was always weird how we could find someone guilty under Title IX while the courts determined they were innocent," the former member said. "That is made even more interesting when we didn't issue sanctions to someone the courts found guilty."

> "It is a jaded but helpful view to look at Title IX not as something to protect the victim, but to instead protect [universities]."
>
> **— Jonathan Gaston-Falk**

The former member said the disconnect between the university, legal standards of evidence and the students involved led to an awkward and messy system where faculty, staff and students were asked to make rulings on highly sensitive cases that could have lasting academic and emotional impacts on those involved.

"Victims don't feel like they're being heard or taken seriously, the accused feel like they're being railroaded through a pseudo legal system," the former member said. "Both claimants and respondents feel like the system is not responding to them because it isn't structurally designed to."

Jonathan Gaston-Falk, an education law attorney at the Student Press Law Center, said that so long as universities meet some core requirements, which include but are not limited to notification, complaint and hearing protocols, they have a lot of agency in how Title IX functions on their campus.

"It falls on each institution to articulate how their Title IX due process will function, so a student at MIT may have a completely different experience to someone at UT Austin who will differ from people at Rice or UTD," Gaston-Falk said.

Gaston-Falk said that the primary way the federal government incentivizes enforcement of Title IX across the country is by withholding federal funding from institutions that fail to adequately implement the law.

"It is a very jaded but helpful view, I think, to look at Title IX as really not meant to protect the victim, but to instead to protect the educational institution," Gaston-Falk said. "You could see all of these rules as insulation to protect the educational institution from the jeopardy of being denied that federal funding — that's the carrot for an educational institution."

Gaston-Falk said survivors of sexual violence or harassment could pursue academic sanctions through Title IX or a criminal filing with the police. Sanctions under UTDBP3102 include but are not limited to disciplinary probation, expulsion, denial of degree and suspension. Gaston-Falk said universities are legally required to respond and treat complaints with care, but that this isn't always the case. He said that the SPLC had received various reports to its legal hotlines about students concerned that their administrators were trying to dissuade some survivors from approaching the police.

"When administrators emphasize the idea of trust in the campus system and keeping things within only the community, they create a huge problem," Gaston-Falk said. "This kind of administrative action only serves to confuse students who are in many cases disoriented by the experience and the process, which can lead to the survivor not feeling that their experience is serious enough or worthy of a police investigation. If as a survivor, you think there should be criminal ramifications for your experience, then the internal Title IX structure will not be able to provide you the full spectrum of relief."

How does UTD compare?

To understand UTD's unique reporting figures, it's best to compare its data to other colleges. In terms of population, The Retrograde chose institutions of various sizes: UTD has a student body of approximately 30,000; UT Austin enrolls about 55,000 students; MIT has a student body of approximately 12,000; and UCLA enrolls about 48,000 students.

to read the rest of the story, visit retrogradenews.com
take CCO's anonymous survivor survey at https://tinyurl.com/utdcco

PHOTO BY RETROGRADE STAFF

Ben Wright was shacked in chains after his arrest May 1, 2024.

LAWSUIT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

conditions after *The Retrograde* published over 2,000 pages of public records relating to the arrests — which included her bond conditions — eight months later. Jump said the original letter given to Admiral seems to be in Wingdings or some other unreadable script.

The suit presents five legal claims against UTD and Texas. The first claim is that the defendants violated Wright and Admiral's employment contracts illegally based on race and national origin. The suit says that protections from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 encompass Palestinian identity and Muslim religious identity, and that Admiral could be visibly identified as Muslim and Wright was a "visible ally." The second legal claim builds upon this with a focus on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act; it says that as a recipient of federal funds, UTD is required to prevent discrimination based on race, color or national origin, but failed to do so in its treatment of the arrested professors.

The third legal claim focuses on the Fourth Amendment and the protections it provides against unreasonable seizures. The case states that no individualized probable cause existed to arrest Wright or Admiral, and that, by bringing police onto UTD's campus, the defendants caused the professors to suffer degrading treatment and intimidation simply because of the opinions they chose to express.

The fourth claim concerns First Amendment violations — the suit says Admiral and Wright were acting in their individual capacities when they engaged in the peaceful encampment and when they stood between the encampment and encroaching law enforcement prior to their arrests. The fifth claim, also related to the First Amendment, focuses on the retaliation the professors have faced since their arrest. The lawsuit focuses on the bans from campus, restricted access to on-campus offices and the looming threat of further discipline the professors experienced.

The defendants named in this lawsuit are former UTD president Richard Benson, current president Prabhas Moghe, UTD, the UT System, Gov. Greg Abbott and Attorney General Ken Paxton. Benson is sued as an individual while the rest are named in their official capacity.

The arrest

On May 1, 2024, 21 faculty, students, alumni and community members were arrested for their involvement in campus protests calling for UTD's divestment from weapons manufacturers and for the liberation of Palestine. Wright and Admiral were among those arrested, spending the night in Collin County Jail alongside arrested students.

During the May 1 protests, Wright and Admiral intermingled with students in Chess Plaza. According to the lawsuit, Wright engaged protesters in dialogue and held a peaceful read-in. Admiral joined in prayer with students she recognized. When law enforcement arrived at Chess Plaza, Wright attempted to deescalate tensions by standing between police and students. At no point did either professor call for violence.

"I saw the police lines coming and, and that's when I started getting much more concerned for the safety of my students," Admiral said. "The arrest was really a shock to the system … to be put in that position where you are not even a person anymore. It's like you're stripped of your humanity, you're just a number, you have to do what you're told."

The professors expressed their pain both during and following their arrests. In D Magazine, Wright reflected on the sweltering heat and mistreatment he faced during his arrest. In Inside Higher Ed, Admiral questioned her ability to serve a university that actively wants to arrest her.

Former UTD president Richard Benson responded in an op-ed published in he Dallas Morning News, claiming that no one was arrested for protesting but instead for criminal trespass after refusing to dismantle and leave the encampment.

Jump wrote in the press release that the statements made by UTD and Texas about the arrests "presumed guilt, when ultimately there wasn't even enough to proceed with charges."

"It absolutely had no basis and put them in a situation they should never have had to endure," Jump said.

The aftermath

The lawsuit alleges that UTD imposed discriminatory restrictions upon Wright and Admiral not required by the court. For example, the suit describes how the professors were required to provide written approval from administrators to continue teaching on campus.

To read the rest of this story, visit retrogradenews.com

ANIKA SULTANA | RETROGRADE STAFF

Ben Wright, seated in a blue folding chair with a microphone in hand, speaks to students gathered in the Chess Plaza during the "Gaza Liberation Plaza" encampment on May 1, 2024.

YUVA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the true Hedgewar lies in the rational medium between accusations of fascism and deified praise. It is through what Nandha calls the progressive conservatism of Hedgewar that India would be able to build up social capital based in unity and fraternity.

Outside the auditorium, a coalition of student groups, faculty and off-campus advocacy organizations decried the event as laundering a fascist leader's image. This clash speaks to an often overlooked ideological conflict on campus.

Nandha's "rational middle ground"

Nandha's biography and discussion at UTD positions itself as a neutral referee in a highly contentious field. Nandha frames Hedgewar as a social reformer in India concerned about the lack of unity in the nation during and after brutal British colonialism. According to him, Hedgewar was an orphan adopted by elite members of Indian society who educated him on European and Indian philosophy. In Nandha's telling, the RSS was conceived not as a political project, but as an apolitical "social experiment" to cure a societal "sickness" of division along the lines of religion, caste, gender and class.

Nandha said Hedgewar is misunderstood in large part because of a lack of "linguistic hygiene." The British mistranslated Hedgewar's idea of Rashtrabhakti as "patriotism" when it would more accurately have been translated as "social capital," he said, which politicized the RSS erroneously. Nandha claimed that Hedgewar's true focus was Deshbhakti, a love for the literal soil of India shared by all its people.

The presentation's portrait of Hedgewar and the RSS as apolitical was punctuated with internal contradictions. Nandha said that Hedgewar's adoptive father, Balakrishna Shivram Moonje, was a leader in the Hindu Mahasabha political party — one of the earliest Hindutva parties in India. Nandha also said that Hedgewar invited Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, one of the key founders of Hindutva ideology, to give a keynote address to the RSS in 1939.

When asked how Hedgewar defined who belonged to the "soil," Nandha said that, in Hedgewar's view, people "self-determined" if they are Indian. To critics like Safa Ahmed, the associate director of media and communications for the Indian American Muslim Council, this ignores the reality that religious minorities, particularly Muslims, Christians and Sikhs in India face. Ahmed said that the RSS and other Hindutva groups frame these minorities as inherently disloyal because they identify as something other than Hindu.

Further questions revealed gaps in Nandha's unifying narrative. Asked about Hedgewar's views on women's rights, Nandha offered no concrete examples of action in their support. The RSS was founded as an all-male organization and continues to be so today. When the audience asked about Hedgewar's stance on linguistic divisions, like those in the state of Tamil Nadu, Nandha said it was simply not one of Hedgewar's "major four issues." One hundred feet away, a UTD trash can was full of flyers highlighting the Indian government's censorship of Vikatan, a Tamil language magazine, for its criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government — a contemporary example of the long-standing cultural-political conflict Nandha's presentation minimized.

SURJADITYA SARKAR | RETROGRADE STAFF

Posters placed by students protesting the Oct. 30 Hindu Yuva event were thrown away before and during the discussion

A history of omissions and contradictions

The event's sanitized tone stood in stark contrast to the alarmed response it provoked from the UTD community.

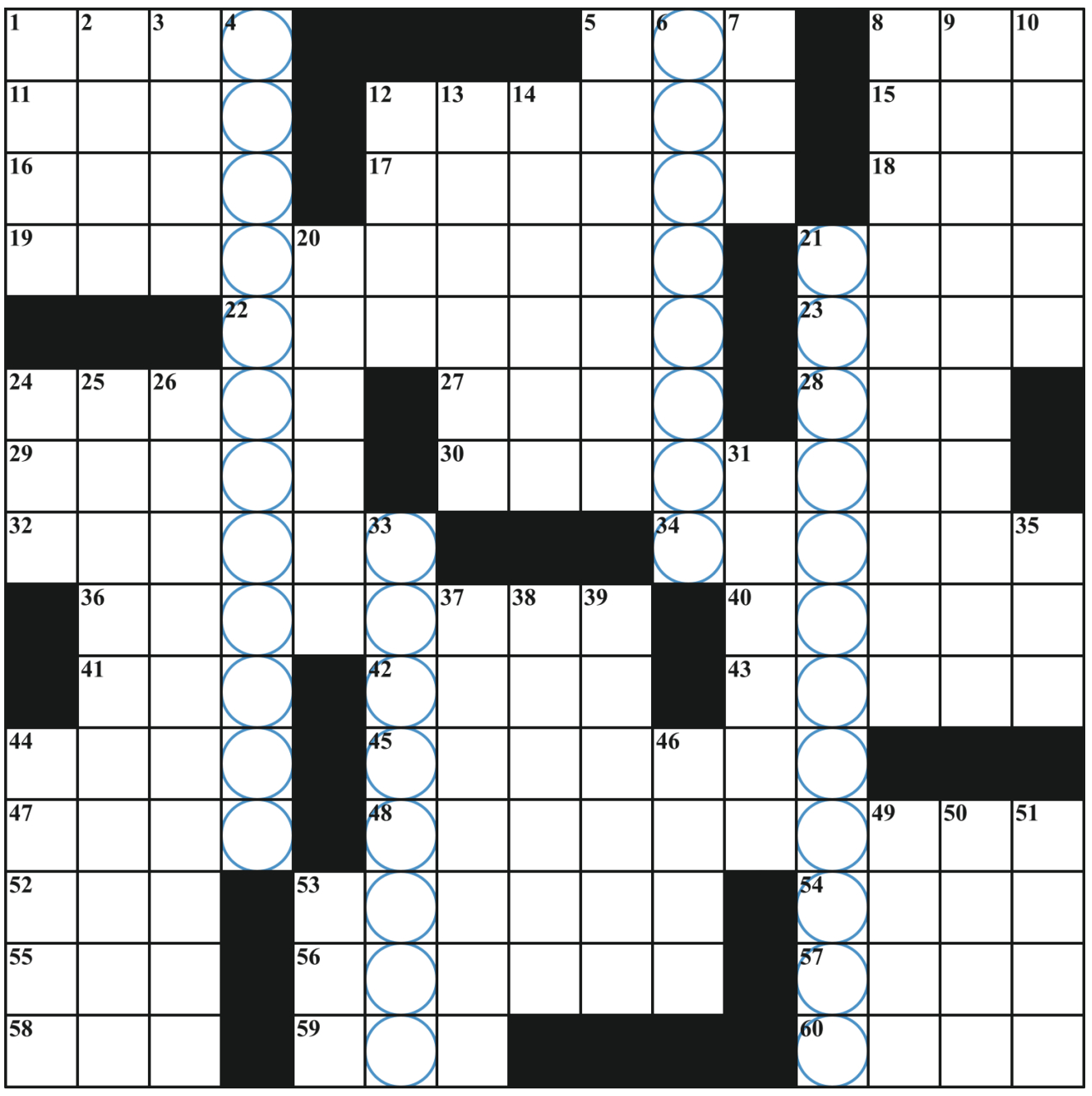
Prior to the lecture, a coalition including the Indian American Muslim Council, Hindus for Human Rights and UTD student groups like the South Asian Pre-Law Student Association sent a letter to the university administration. It labeled the RSS a "a fascist paramilitary organization" and made extensive citation of RSS actions and statements throughout history, including Hedgewar's RSS successor, Madhav Sadashivrao Golwalkar, who praised Hitler and the Holocaust.

"Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by," Golwalkar said in his book "We or Our Nationhood Defined."

In an official statement to The Retrograde, Hindu Yuva at UTD said that the event was organized to host a scholar and engage in "a conversation and open discussion." Hindu Yuva said its focus was to reflect on Hedgewar's ideas of social capital and how India could engage in national self-reflection after decolonization. The coalition letter stood firmly against this view.

To read the rest of this story, visit retrogradenews.com.

Under Construction



TYLER CRIVELLA | RETROGRADE STAFF

Across

1 Unpaid TV spots
5 Audio waves
8 Small batteries
11 We covered its opening on the second page!
12 Growing cause of a problem?
15 Police rank: Abbr.
16 Mrs., in Frankfurt
17 Brownish monkey
18 Mrs., in Mexico
19 Smelly fish tin
21 Existed
22 My Chemical Romance, e.g.
23 Some, in Barcelona
24 Playground set
27 Feminine suffix
28 Addams Family cousin
29 1983 Streisand film
30 Spooked
32 Religious ceremony
34 Soaked
36 Hip Chinese music genre
40 Gyro breads
41 Black bird
42 E-cig
43 "___ Gay" (WWII B-29)
44 Thus
45 Archiac soon
47 Futile
48 Singers of "Surf City"
52 Bach's "Mass ___ Minor"
53 Europe's largest lake
54 Creature of show that sold out last week at the University Theatre
55 Phone number, on a business card
56 Units of a play
57 Brains
58 Before
59 Victim of Russia: Abbr.
60 Tree house?

Down

1 Email attachments
2 FDR's mother
3 Sandarac tree
4 Wedding between university classmates?
5 1982 Toto hit
6 Creators
7 Urban grid: Abbr.
8 Approved of
9 Much, for a car salesman?
10 Online supporters
12 Florence's river
13 Athens' ancient rival
14 Take back, as testimony
20 "Good to hear!"
21 Adding a basement, maybe?
24 Damascus' land: Abbr.
25 German grey dog
26 Ethereal
31 First-class
33 UTD's weirdest date-place
35 Surveillance org.
37 Street celebration walker
38 Time capsule command
39 Fur
44 Online RSVP
46 "Carry ___ usual"
49 Great Lake
50 FBI workers: Abbr.
51 Another bird's bed
53 Baton Rouge college

DIFFICULTY

★★★☆☆

Need a hint?

Clues that end with "?" contain some form of wordplay or riddle. Clues that end with "Abbr." are an abbreviation or acronym. Grid spaces with a circle are theme words that tie into the puzzle's title, with the last theme word "revealing" the premise of the theme.

Check online
Rc3, bxc3,Bc2#

Puzzles

KenKen

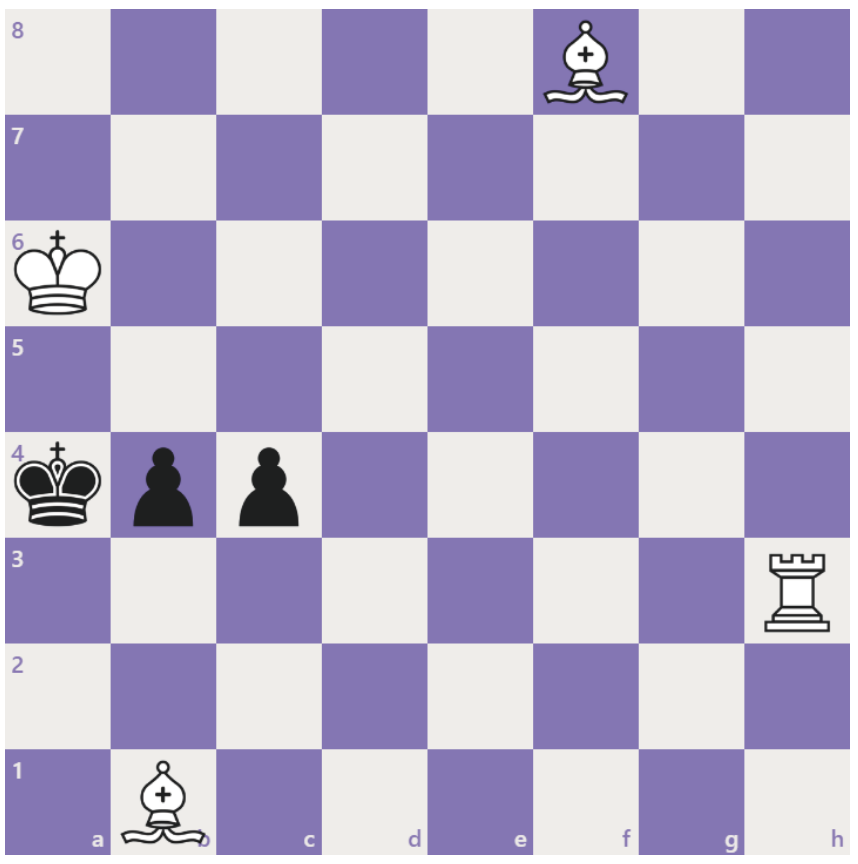
Instructions: Your goal is to fill up the 6×6 grid with numbers 1-6. Each column and row must have exactly one of each number. Each box (outlined with thick black lines) has a target number and a mathematical operation listed in the top-left corner. The numbers in each box must result in the target number when the corresponding mathematical operation is employed. For example, a box with 3+ could be satisfied with 1 and 2, as 1+2=3. Visit our website for a full walkthrough.

15×	6×	1-		8×	
		15+			
3÷	2-		6×		1-
	5+		10×		
10+	6+			2÷	11+
		2÷			

RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

Chess

Instructions: Find the best move or moves to achieve checkmate! It is white's turn to move. Solution is available under the crossword.



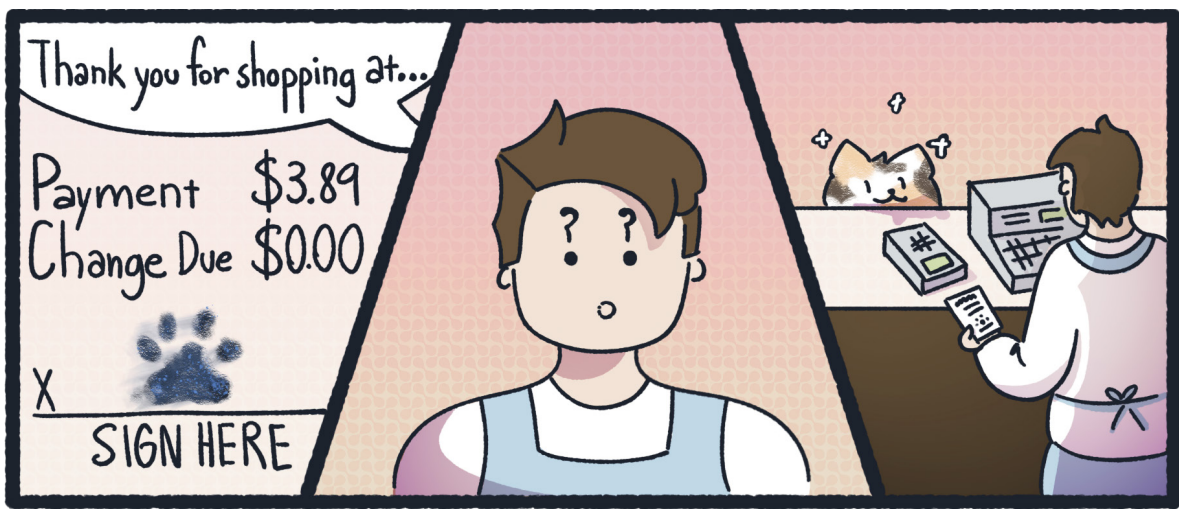
ROHITH RAMAN | RETROGRADE STAFF

Comics

INADVISABLE

DEBORAH LUO | RETROGRADE STAFF

CAT CAFE



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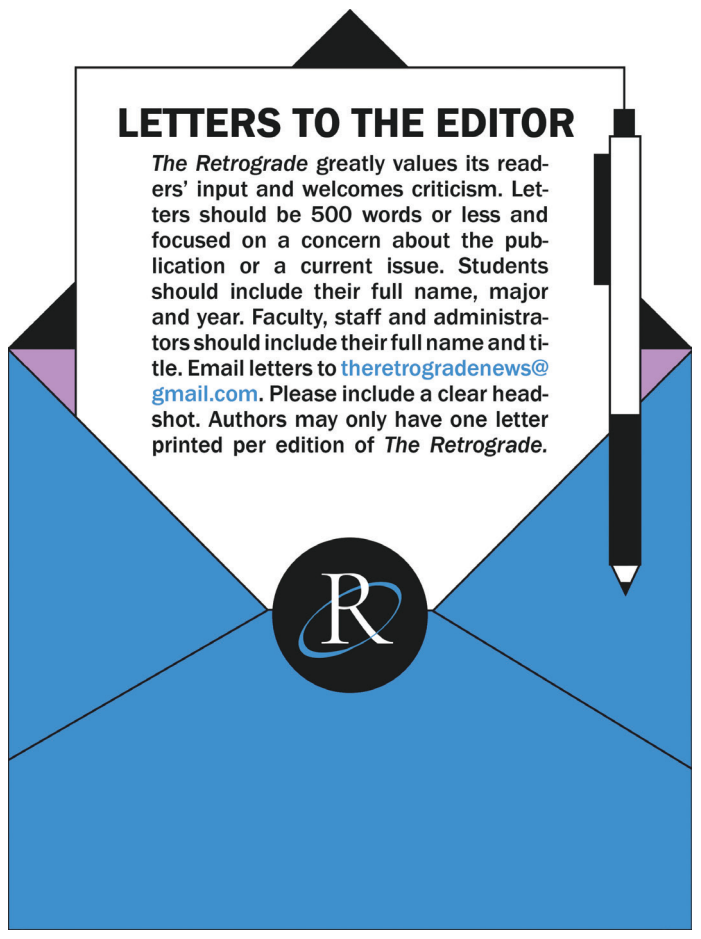

America's sexiest college mascot?

Comets have been producing sultry depictions of UTD's mascot for years — and have no intentions of turning down the heat.

RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

MUAAZ ABED
Retrograde Staff

HENRY DAVIS
Retrograde Staff

His blazing hair is slicked back, his azure lips pucker slightly and his washboard abs glisten in the sunlight. This describes but one piece of salacious Temoc fanart created as an ode to UTD's mascot. From sultry body pillows to intense fan fiction, students have made their carnal desire for Temoc well-known throughout the UTD community. And that insatiable lust stems from the heart of what makes Comets unique, said David Baker, neuroscience junior and Student Government vice president.

"I think we have a very unique culture around how we treat our mascot that most other universities do not," Baker said. "I think [Temoc appreciation] helps build a lot more of the actual culture on campus, because we don't really have [a] big unifying thing like a football team, for example. So I think people find other ways to kind of rally around it. I think Temoc is one of those rallying points."

If there is a ground zero for this phenomenon, it's the radioactive offices of UTD's official opinion and satire magazine A Modest Proposal. AMP has been producing provocative portrayals of Temoc for years, with some highlights being their 2019 body pillow giveaway and the covers of their infamous February issues. Animation and games senior Sasha Wuu, the Editor-in-Chief of AMP, said the impetus to pump out Temoc erotica was to shock readers of the magazine.

"Something that I wanted to do [with the magazine] is push the boundaries a little bit," Wuu said. "I felt like it was a good time to scandalize people, because I think that that's something that's satire, that's something this kind of magazine does really well."

The influence of sexy Temoc extends beyond AMP, it has infiltrated the entire campus. Student Government held a fanfiction competition from 2022 to 2023, EROL, where Comets submitted all kinds of fanworks ranging from shipping Temoc with Enarc to detailing the painful account of Temoc and the former president of UTD's divorce. Even the official UTD Temoc account references his salacious reputation from time to time. Wuu said the sexy Temoc phenomenon is a result of UTD students taking the mascot and making it their own.

"I think [sexy Temoc's] a fun spin on collegiate mascot culture," Wuu said. "[Mascots are] usually brought about as this very sanitized, cryptic thing that the school wants to present. The way I see the sexy Temoc bit is students making it more their own. It's us interacting with that mascot in a way that is more personal, and I think that it's a really strong way to engage with the culture on our campus."

According to Wuu, there are no plans to slow down smut production at AMP. Wuu said sexy Temoc is not just a fun way for students to express themselves at UTD, but also an avenue through which important taboo topics like sex can be discussed.

"It's definitely something that I think is a fun kind of thing to participate in on campus," Wuu said. "I think that continuing that conversation over more sexual, more taboo subjects, is still something that is very valuable. I think that it continues to do a good thing, to bring attention to that kind of thing, so there's definitely plans in the works for [more sexy Temoc] for as long as I'm here."

The Retrograde reached out to Student Affairs Senior Director of Marketing Jenni Huffenberger for comment regarding this usage of the school's mascot. As of publication, Huffenberger did not respond to comment.

COURTESY | Victoria Bruno

ERIN GUTSCHKE | RETROGRADE STAFF

RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

COURTESY | John Huang

Comet Comments:

The sultry depictions of Temoc invite a spectrum of reactions from Comets, ranging from abject disgust to insatiable hunger for more scantily-clad portrayals of the UTD mascot.

"Temoc shouldn't be this sexy, ever."
- biology freshman Leslonie Edusei

"[Sexy Temoc's] always existed as long as UTD's existed, basically. "I don't have an opinion on it. It's just like the sidewalk, you just come to accept it."
- business analytics senior Clark Baird

"Sexy Temoc is better than actual Temoc. This is better — I would rather see sexy Temoc all over campus. I would be less scared."
- psychology freshman Aja Thornton

"I don't really care for [sexy Temoc]. I think that that's the intention. I don't think it's anything subversive. He's an anthropomorphized comet and he's extremely buff. I feel like the people who designed him had that intention in mind and I feel like you're just playing into what the administration wants by making him sexy."
- literature junior Kavya Racheeti

"Sexy Temoc is what keeps UTD alive, I think."
- literature senior Caleb Jenkins

Miao Carroll-ton: boba with a nerdy twist

Miao Carrollton's boba patters into hearts with differentiating themselves by simply being different

MAR OLOGBAN
Retrograde Staff

On Aug. 31, a new boba shop offering a unique twist for North Texas nerds quietly opened in Carrollton, just a 15-minute drive from UTD. Miao distinguishes itself from competitors by wholeheartedly embracing cosplay, anime and local art, creating a late-night haven for these subcultures.

The shop is the brainchild of its owner, known publicly as "Mr. Miao." He decided to become his own boss on his 21st birthday, seeking an escape from the corporate grind.

"Breaking my back for someone who does not care if I am dead or alive for the rest of my life is not all that appealing to me," Miao said. "A wage feels like golden handcuffs I was taught to discreetly flex."

Upon entering, customers are greeted not just by the smell of brewing tea, but by rows of trinkets and art from local DFW artists. Crochet Sanrio plushies are littered across every shelf. K-pop stickers on chairs and tables help make the shop into a vibrant display that pulls visitors deeper into the space. A chalkboard covered in customer-made art dominates the shop's interior. Miao wanted to give artists a platform, believing a community hub was the perfect place.

"Artists exist to give humans who don't know how to properly explain something a visual or a sound cue," Miao said. "Without artists, we would just be machines."

The shop's most distinctive policy is its embrace of cosplay. Any customer who arrives in costume receives a free drink — a reward for their bravery. While other area boba shops may host game nights, Miao Carrollton actively incentivizes and celebrates nerd culture at its core.

"You [cosplayers] encourage others to be weird, and people should be weird," Miao said. "If people are weird, that's a good thing because it allows us to be our true self."

This focus transforms the shop into a mini convention. Miao, who found joy at conventions, wanted to recreate that inclusive atmosphere.

"One of the few times that I walked around with an actual smile on my face was when I was at a convention," Miao said. "I was just like, why not have something like that here?"

The community focus extends to everyday interactions. Miao and his staff are encouraged to play Jenga or solve puzzles with customers, seeing this connection as a vital part of the service. This is a deliberate shift from Miao's initial, more profit-driven mindset. He now believes that without this human element, he would face burnout. Miao encourages his workers to talk to everyone and doesn't see it as them just messing around: he sees it as actual work being done.

to read the rest of the story, visit retrogradenews.com

MAR OLOGBAN | RETROGRADE STAFF

Drawing board at Miao Carrollton featuring community-made art from a variety of different online subcultures.

HAPPY RET

What's the Scoop?: Halloween Edition

Halloween isn't the same for everyone — find out what your fellow students are doing this Halloween

PARTHA KULKARNI
Retrograde Staff

Most remember the Halloween of their childhood as jack-o-lantern carving in the afternoon, struggling to fit into your now months-old costume and an in-depth survey of the neighborhood for Hershey's and KitKats — while avoiding the occasional no-show households. However, Halloween has evolved drastically from this classic image, with unique cultural celebrations emerging worldwide.

Halloween's origin traces back over 2,000 years to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, which marked the beginning of winter. Legend has it that during Samhain, the veil between our world and the other world was its thinnest, allowing spirits to pass through. People would wear costumes, light bonfires and carve objects to ward off the harmful spirits.

Today, Ireland's Halloween is far more diversified, with the Púca Festival both paying homage and replacing Samhain in the Ancient East. Meanwhile, Northern Ireland celebrates Derry Halloween, which consists of tricks and treats, such as circus acrobatics, Samhain baking demonstrations and street food.

Other countries, such as the United Kingdom and Japan, share celebrations similar to Halloween, with candy and costumes, but with their own unique spin. For the United Kingdom, it's Guy Fawkes Day on Nov. 5. Guy Fawkes was a revolutionary who attempted to assassinate King James I with a barrel of gunpowder, and as such, the whole country celebrates with bonfires. In lieu of trick-or-treating for candy, children instead go around asking for "a penny for the Guy."

Japan instead celebrates Obon, a Buddhist holiday where spiritual ancestors are believed to have come back to Earth to visit, much like Samhain. During Obon, people place lanterns outside their homes, visit their ancestors' graves and make food offerings at home altars. Toward the end of the festivities, people place floating lanterns in the sea so that the spirits can find their way back to the afterlife.

While ghouls, candy and costumes can captivate children, the appeal typically fades with age. For those college-aged and older, the euphoria disappears and they opt out of Halloween, mostly retiring to the giving end of Halloween.

There is a sizeable number of

...

Horror doesn't scare in this exhibition, it calls for reflection

The Horror Part 2: A Haunting leaves viewers uncomfortable not with what they see on the outside, but rather with themselves

NANDINI SINGH
Life & Arts Editor

KAITLYN VAN NICE | RETROGRADE STAFF

Artworks showcased at SP/N gallary, on display until the end of the exhibition Nov. 22.

Typical art exhibitions might include calming landscapes, thought-provoking colors and a quiet space to reflect. The Horror Part 2: A Haunting is not your typical art exhibition. Breaking such conventions, the exhibition invites audiences to evaluate and call for change in their lives and the actions they take.

The SP/N Gallery will showcase "The Horror Part 2: A Haunting" until Nov. 22. Opening Oct. 17, The Horror Part 2: A Haunting was built off last year's exhibition, part one of the continuing series. While the past year focused on iconic and recognizable imagery, such as Ghostface from Scream and psychological monsters, this year takes a more subtle yet evoking approach.

Part 2 focuses on history as well as society's lack of growth. For Danielle Avram, SP/N gallery director and co-curator for this particular exhibition, this was where the exhibition was born: in the mistakes and "haunts" of the past.

"It feels like we are not learning any lessons from the past and cycling through the same things over and over again," Avram said. "It's never a smooth path: we are always moving forward struggling, moving struggling."

The exhibition reflects on themes of uneasiness, a common perception of horror. Yet, it also takes on different angles of uneasiness through being unknown or mystical. Avram finds that those words demonstrate horror in a way that connects with audiences' confusion, especially in a time period full of uncertainty and rapidly moving technology, whether faced by personal conflicts or by the masses.

"This idea of being haunted can be that you are haunted by something that has happened in the past or maybe things that are happening now," Avram said." "But, we are also a lot of the times feeling that we are one step away from something really bad happening. There is just so much that we don't know right now, and I feel that haunts a lot of us, that feeling of not being really assured."

While the gallery may seem to be a haven for those who are attracted to themes of haunting and uneasiness, many might not find themselves holding the same views. To Avram, the unique part of any exhibition, especially those that carry heavier themes. is the ability to change one's perception by simply helping them find a singular connection.

"In a very basic sense there are certain things people are attracted to," Avram said. "I do think there is a way to ease people into work they find challenging and it really comes down to talking to them about it and getting people to find one thing they feel connected to."

As viewers walk through the gallery, the abundance of variety is clear: videography, photography and material sculpture work together, despite their elaborate diversity. One provocative work, a wind phone, an idea originating out of Japan, allows audiences to leave a message on a rotary phone and hear the sound of wind on the other end of the line.

Shaped canvases with large ornate frames and amorphous figures line one particular wall. Ever Baldwin, the artist of those three particular art pieces had a mindset that never began with an intention to be horror-themed, but fit not only with the work but the idea behind horror.

"There's this sense of shifting and changing and not being sure of definitions, which I think has a lot to do with horror," Baldwin said. "It's the idea of things not necessarily being what they seem on the surface."

Baldwin's art has a unique element: the frames. Each of the frames began with her awareness of the edges and limitation around the canvas. Extending the image beyond the 4 by 4, she began making frames out of materials such as styrofoam and paper matchet, and in later years wood.

"I like how the frame is a bridge in a way between two worlds; the world of painting and the everyday world we inhabit," Baldwin said.

Even with all these materials and forms, audiences would instantly note the vast amounts of white space and emptiness in the gallery. A purposeful decision by the gallery, Avram said the aim was to have different sensations take a hold of the viewer. With no outdoor lighting in the gallery, only the light from projections or sounds from art forms guides audiences' senses across the overall space.

One particular Finland-based artist, Tatu Gustafsson, has his photography hung on the wall, with light emanating from the corner of the gallery. His art at the exhibition spans nine years, driving throughout Finland to stand by roadside weather cameras which took photos of him. Spending most nights living out in a car, his reason behind the art stems from his sense of exploration.

"I was in a position where I wanted to think [of] what [type] of art I [wanted] to do," Gustafsson said. "I studied photography, and I wanted to try something new because during school I felt I had used traditional [ways] to do photography. I wanted to let go of this artist that controls everything about the image they are making."

While many found Gustafsson's photos to have a scary element to it based on him standing far back from the photos and the dark lighting Gustafsson chooses not to put a label to the emotions.

TRO-WEEN

Comet couture: How fashion on campus reflects the fashion culture of DFW

UTD students describe their personal style and fashion inspirations

SAHASRA ELAPROLU
Retrograde Staff

A colorful top, a leather bag, funky jewelry — a fashion girl's closet is filled to the brim. Harnessing her creativity and inspired taste, she assembles the perfect fall outfit, anchored by her best thrift find yet: a chocolate-brown bag. As she walks across campus, she draws fresh inspiration from the stylish outfits of her peers, already envisioning the next day's ensemble.

Over the past decade, the DFW fashion scene has blossomed. With new designers like Jaquiline Cole and Von Denise debuting their collections at the decade-old Dallas Fashion Week, designer stores such as Mui Mui and Givenchy popping up all over the metroplex and vintage shops like Fetch and Add Vintage dominating downtown Dallas, DFW is making way for new creatives to develop a unique fashion culture in the area.

This energy is everywhere at UTD, where fashion is becoming a key medium for student expression. Organizations like the university's Fashion Club fuel this culture by screening fashion shows, connecting creatives and helping students explore career paths within the industry.

Upon first glance, it's clear that biology freshman Olivia Teibowei has a passion for fashion. Her unique clothing and creative taste make her stand out in a crowd.

"I feel like I really became interested [in fashion] my freshman year of high school just as a way to express myself," Teibowei said. "I've also found people with similar styles to me and those are who I've become friends with."

Teibowei's self-described style is a mixture of Japanese fashion and whimsy. She said she takes inspiration for her style from social media and people she sees walking around in her daily life. UTD Fashion Club Vice President Crystal Noorani said she, too, takes inspiration from social media along with physical magazines.

"I used to buy magazines from Barnes & Noble and I used to keep a scrapbook with all my designs when I was younger," Noorani said.

Noorani describes her style as cottage-core, citing the brand LoveShackFancy as a key inspiration. Freshman Vera Tsai, too, finds her style roots in high-end designers.

"I have a couple influencers that I follow but if we're talking designers, I really like Vivienne Westwood and the late Bella Pietro," Tsai said.

For both Tsai and Noorani, their style journeys accelerated during the pandemic—an inflection point for fashion worldwide. According to a 2024 Voice of America survey, 79% of Americans changed their style due to more flexible work schedules.

"I had a lot of free time," Tsai said. "Especially with all the social media use, I saw a lot of different people expressing themselves through fashion. I thought that was really cool."

Not everyone got their 'fashion start' during the pandemic, however. Biochemistry freshman Nour Awad said she also uses social media to develop her style, providing an outlet for research and inspiration.

"I felt like throughout all of high school I was very basic," Awad said. "I would just wear leggings and a T-shirt every day and I felt like I wanted to be a bit more different in college. Even though I'm still very basic, I feel like I dress a bit more differently."

Walking around campus, a spectrum of styles is on display: streetwear, minimalism, preppy and athleisure, among others. Tsai said she often notices people incorporating elements of her own style, a testament to her diverse closet.

"I don't think I have one specific style," Tsai said. "I think I'm a collage of a lot of different things but I will see a lot of people with similar dressing styles as me because I have so many different ones."

Noorani also made her style her own and dresses depending on her mood and the occasion.

"I feel like I have a lot of different styles in my closet," Noorani said. "It took me years to realize what I like and don't like apart from trends."

Ultimately, the fashion culture at UTD mirrors the diversity of DFW itself. With students developing styles that range from minimalist to coquette to Japanese-inspired, the campus's unique blend of everyday wear and creative flair offers a glimpse into the future of North Texas fashion.

"It's fun not to follow trends but to find out what works for you specifically," Noorani said. "I feel like when you have a cooler outfit or you go thrifting and find something vintage, it brings happiness."

COURTESY | FIND CREDIT!!!

Names of interviewees, listed, as soon as we know them...

LIVE SYMPHO-NY BRINGS NOSTALGIA AND MUSIC UNDER THE NIGHT SKY

The Richardson Symphony Orchestra let the audience relive their favorite films through their soundtracks.

VARUN SARAVANA
Retrograde Staff

On the evening of Oct. 19, the SCI courtyard was transformed into an open-air concert hall for the Richardson Symphony Orchestra's Sunset Serenade. At 6:30 p.m., the sky was still lit, seemingly unusual for a sunset-based concert with the tag "Under the Stars." Though I felt it was too early to begin, the orchestra was ready and waiting under spotlights for the moment they could play. I found my way to one of the only open benches at the opposite end of the space, thinking that I might be late because of the turnout.

Despite having very little advertising—I personally only saw one lawn sign prior to the event—about the orchestra, it was overwhelmingly crowded. Every inch of the grass was taken over by families, students and couples swathed in blankets, eagerly waiting in their foldable chairs. In this unexpectedly diverse crowd, people across generations seemed to find a common resonance with the shared space.

The maestro spoke casually to the crowd, his conversational tone a contrast to the suspenseful music to come as he outlined the evening's highlights. His speech promised an interactive lesson on how to conduct a piece from "How to Train your Dragon" for the young ones. Mention of the worldwide box office hit that pulled on the heartstrings of an entire generation 15 years ago spread murmurs of excitement through the crowd.

In the outdoor space, the environment captivated the audience as much as the music did. Personally, as one of my favorite themes from the movie "Superman" began playing, I was reminded of what the movie symbolized: hope — and with that, the dimming skies near the Sciences Building felt nothing short of profound. The atmosphere drew people in. Students stopped by in passing and took a moment to hear the orchestra play a familiar tune.

The tunes did not stop at music from present day; rather, the program included decades-old music as well. One such soundtrack, a classic of Steven Spielberg, brought an-

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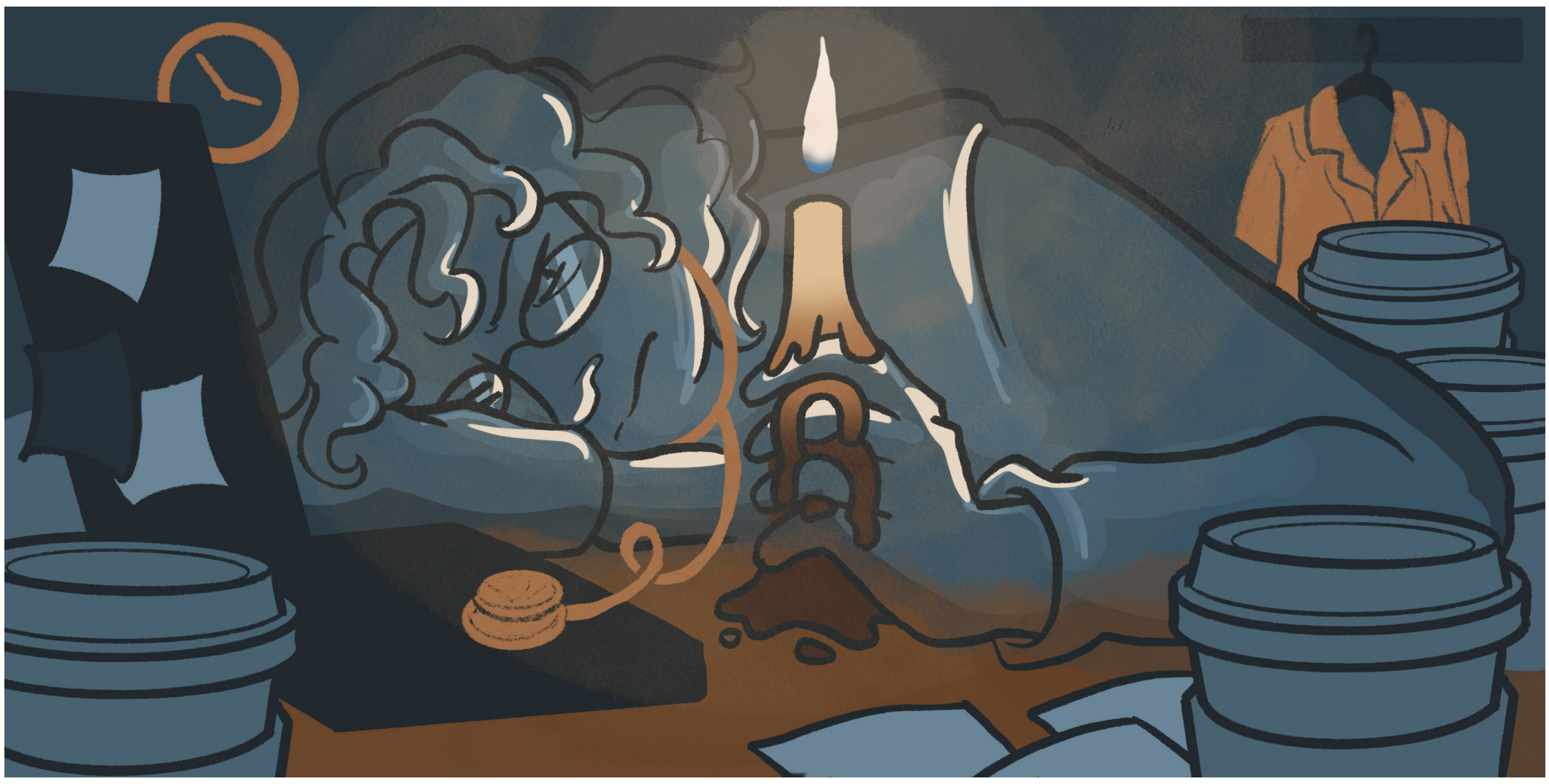
Burnout isn't a prerequisite for med school

Pre-med culture romanticizes exhaustion, treating stress as proof of passion, but real dedication means knowing when to rest



NURFATIHAH ZULKIFLY
Staff Writer

At UTD it is the expectation that you burn out. This mental exhaustion from prolonged stress is so common that most of us can't imagine what campus culture would be like without it, and the issue only gets worse when we look specifically at pre-med students.

We've begun to treat it not as a warning sign, but as proof of passion: a badge that shows we care enough to keep going even when we're running on empty and have been for the past two or three semesters. For students chasing competitive careers like medicine, chronic stress has become so normalized that it's seen not as a problem, but as a measure of commitment.

The pre-med student has become its own stereotype: ambitious, overworked and trying a little too hard to look the part. It's not the path to medicine that exhausts us. It's the culture we've built around it.

I've fallen victim to this myself. There are weeks I chase opportunities and fill every block of my Google Calendar until there's no white space left to breathe. I convince myself I just need more discipline, but it always ends the same way: I push myself past my limits, rationalizing that constant fatigue and a reliance on caffeine are just part of the pre-med identity.

Students feel pressured to juggle it all: shadowing, research, volunteering, leadership and a flawless GPA. Many of us feel that if we aren't constantly maxing out our schedules, we're falling behind. This mindset makes it seem acceptable to sacrifice health and well-being on the altar of ambition. The busier you are, the more legitimate you feel as a future doctor; meanwhile, the guilt of doing "less" can be crushing.

Neuroscience major Sneha Sharma, President of Molding Doctors, said that many pre-med students lose sight of medicine's core values.

"There's a bit of a 'toxic culture' within pre-med," Sharma said. "Only about 40% of applicants get into medical school, so it's very competitive. People start thinking, 'I need to cure cancer, I need to do everything.'"

In the chase, we idolize online personas with perfect scores instead of focusing on compassion and capability.

This culture of overwork is ubiquitous. On social media, "study grind" accounts glorify unhealthy habits—chugging energy drinks at 3 a.m., pulling all-nighters — treating exhaustion like a badge of honor. On campus, the same mindset manifests in how we talk about our schedules, compare achievements, and silently measure ourselves against others. There's even a label for its extreme: the "gunner," the student who treats peers as competition. When everyone around you is operating at full speed, burnout starts to feel normal, even necessary, just to keep up.

It is true that medical schools are intensely competitive and the path is rigorous by design —healthcare demands profound knowledge and resilience. But medical schools don't want burned-out students; they value depth over a mere quantity of activities. Acknowledging the difficulty of the path shouldn't mean accepting a culture that disregards student health before we even get there. Hard work is necessary; self-neglect is not.

> "There's a bit of a 'toxic culture' within pre-med. People start thinking ... they need to do everything"
>
> — Sneha Sharma

People say this grind is merely preparation for the demands of medical school and a career in medicine. But that's precisely why learning balance now is essential. A future doctor who never learned to rest won't suddenly start once they're responsible for patients. If we normalize pushing through exhaustion now, we risk carrying that harmful mindset into a career where other people's health depends on ours.

The consequences of this culture extend far beyond undergraduate struggles. In healthcare, many providers experience compassion fatigue — an emotional exhaustion that makes it difficult to connect with patients. Studies show that doctors and nurses under chronic stress often feel detached or cynical, which harms both their own mental health and patient outcomes. The habit of working to exhaustion, forged in pre-med, can solidify into the same patterns of compassion fatigue that plague the profession.

UTD's pre-med community isn't uniquely toxic; it's part of a broader culture that measures worth by productivity. But change starts with recognizing that this is not the only way to succeed. The pre-med path will always be demanding; however, rigor doesn't mean delaying rest.

Too often, stress is treated as a personal weakness instead of a shared experience. But burnout becomes easier to manage the more openly we talk about it. That means checking in on friends who seem overwhelmed, being honest when we're struggling and reminding each other that rest doesn't make us less ambitious. Change starts with those conversations, saying "I'm exhausted" or "I need to slow down" without guilt or shame.

Acknowledging burnout is only the first step, and how you use that awareness matters. Think of watching your favorite show or taking time to recharge as an investment in your future. A good night's sleep isn't optional, it fuels focus, memory and resilience, while short breaks between study sessions help you retain information far more effectively than grinding nonstop.

If simply keeping up with your responsibilities leaves you feeling drained, it may be a sign that you are overburdening yourself, not that you aren't working hard enough. Focus on the commitments that you enjoy; stepping back from the rest allows you to invest more fully in the experiences that matter most to you.

As Sharma said: "It's important to reassess — what are you working on, how can you decrease your workload, and how can you focus on things that truly matter to you? If you can delegate tasks, do that."

The energy spent comparing yourself to others or following "med-influencers" who glorify exhaustion is energy better spent on your own well-being. True dedication to your future career isn't measured by how far you push past your limits, but by how wisely you respect them. How you learn to care for yourself now sets the foundation for how you will care for others in the future.

The State Fair menu is a hodgepodge — to our benefit

The State Fair unveiled a menu of new cuisines and social experiments in a trend of having intriguing items take the concession stands

HENRY DAVIS
Staff Writer

Food judging records at the state fair date back to 2005 with two key categories: "Best Taste" and "Most Creative," with past winners including "Fried PB, Jelly and Banana Sandwich" and "Viva Las Vegas Fried Ice Cream" — ice cream coated with a crunchy bite and then deep fried — respectively. In essence, the food is simple, neither extreme nor diverse, but fried American staples.

When compared to 2005, the 2025 top-awarded foods show complexity: "Crab and Mozzarella Arancini," deep fried balls of rice, cheese, herbs and spices, awarded for "Best Taste - Savory" and "Wagyu Bacon Cheeseburger Deviled Egg Sliders" awarded for "Most Creative." Since 2005, the categories "Best Sweet" and "Best Sipper" have joined, and in 2025 they were respectively given to the "Chill and Thrill Delight," a Colombia-inspired cold dessert with tropical fruits, and "Cookie Chaos Milkshake," a milkshake with original and golden Oreos as well as snickerdoodle bites.

"You have to be creative, the fair demanded that," Anthony Bednar, co-creator of the "Chill and Thrill Delight," said. "I think a lot of them [fairgoers] are glad this it isn't just fried food anymore."

Bednar said that during the fair's 24-day run, his shop had sold over 20,000 units of "Chill and Thrill Delight." For Bednar's other creation, the "Birria Bomb" — deep-fried balls of Birria meat, mashed potatoes and Oaxaca cheese — he discussed that he was shocked because of such high demand over the new item at a past fair. This experience led Bednar to buying and selling 30,000 pounds of taco meat and 20,000 pounds of chicken, simultaneously shocking himself and the fair management.

The big winners are not only adapting in the limit of what a food should be but what can influence it: Japanese Wagyu beef, Sicilian rice balls and Colombia's Salpicon de Frutas fruit cocktail. It doesn't stop with the big winners of these categories, either — one of the finalists for 2025 "Best Savory" were "Deep Fried Tacos," fried tacos filled with pastrami, mashed potatoes, chives and white cheese.

"It's like a Jewish deli crashed into a taqueria," Juan Reaves, who with his brother Brent created the "Deep Fried Tacos," sad.

Both brothers reaffirm that creativity and originality are required for food vendors to be noticed at the fair; if someone else has done something, the Reaves won't pursue it. With Bednar, the Reaves' sentiment is shared among the vendor community. This pursuit of nicheness has led the brothers to TV spots with Jimmy Kimmel, the Food Network and the Dallas Morning News.

"We look at the years where we don't have a winner or finalist, you can see a drop off in sales," Juan Reaves said.

The brothers stated the food must have creative, original and taste components, or they won't be noticed for the fair judging, and thus, noticed by the food influencers or anyone with a menu pamphlet. For just the "Deep Fried Tacos," the Reaves sold over 4,000 units during the fair's 24-day duration.

"You can't get away with what you did five years ago today with the hype from food influencers," Brent Reaves said.

The explanation for why fair food grows to be Frankenstein-esque creations of cultural, trendy and non-definitive foods is clear: the people want fresh and tasty, whether it be the judges who likely know the history of contested food to veteran fairgoers who are revived every late September for the fair's showcase of food and drinks. People want to be introduced to Hispanic, Jewish, Asian and other cuisines, be a part of trends such as Dubai chocolate and be a part of the changing food scene. The Bednars and Reaves, along with the other Fair vendor community, provide those opportunities.

YIYI DING | RETROGRADE STAFF

While the food and drinks taste good, look crazy and are definitely new, the race for the next hodgepodge item has attracted people to the spectacle, with both vendors' Facebook pages flooded with comments of positive exclamation from friends and strangers. There is a devoted community around fair food. Not only do the vendors get to share their creations with the world, but the fairgoers also get to be a part of that experience.

"May you come as our guest and leave as a family," Bednar said. "Let's come in here [the fair] like a big melting pot and be one big family."

It's official: *The Retrograde* is old now

After a tumultuous first year, UTD's official student newspaper reflects on its progress

It's been one year since *The Retrograde* was born after UTD administration's crackdown against former student newspaper *The Mercury.* Instead of buckling to the university's demands for us to censor our critical and investigative coverage, we started our own independent publication by students, for students.

And what a first year we've had.

In our first year, we:

-Received over 1.5 million views across our social media accounts and website, something The Mercury had never accomplished in the past.

-Published 221 articles covering everything from student protests to local art and music, to how sexual assaults are covered up on campus, to how state and federal laws are redefining life at UTD.

-Became a nonprofit so we can manage our own affairs without administration's ever-watchful eye over our shoulder.

-Joined a lawsuit against the UT System to oppose Senate Bill 2972, a law restricting campus free speech.

-Made our Managing Editor president of Texas student journalists to start building our own version of the Associated Press.

-Created new university policies to make our school more just.

-Published over 2,000 pages of public records that revealed key details about the May 1, 2024 student encampment and arrests.

As massive changes continue sweeping through Texas and the U.S. at large, *The Retrograde* will be out in the field covering the good and the bad, and especially the things people in power don't want you to know. Here's to many more years of sharp-eyed campus journalism that doesn't hesitate to ask tough questions, even if it makes us some powerful enemies.

The Retrograde appreciates your support over this past year. If you have any suggestions for how to improve our coverage, reach out via direct message or email us at retrogradenews@gmail.com.

DEBORAH LUO | RETROGRADE STAFF

RETROGRADE READS: THE 'PURIFYING' IMPULSE NEVER LEFT TEXAS

This decade-long research project tracing a line from "better baby" contests and academic race science to great replacement theory is a must-read

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

From the small town of Littlefield, Texas, just northwest of Lubbock, Arthur Duggan launched his 1931 campaign for U.S. Congress with a creative — if chilling — solution to the crime problem: stop making criminals.

"Our present method of 'reformation' is working on the symptoms instead of the disease," he argued in his congressional platform. "Let's begin at the other end … and in a few years the problems will be solved."

Duggan's proposed cure was eugenics, and he was not alone. At the time, other Texas scholars and newspapers like the Dallas Morning News supported his efforts. Duggan's story, exhumed from dusty archives, is one of dozens revealed in "The Purifying Knife: The Troubling History of Eugenics in Texas."

The new book hails from historian Michael Phillips and writer Betsy Friauf, a literary husband-wife team who went through hell and back to make this book possible. The novel builds upon Phillips' prior work in "White Metropolis" to uncover a Texas where, as the authors write, "Monsters haunted the imaginations of some of the most educated white Texans … Versed in the latest 'race science,' these well-read Texans pictured a host of those they demeaned as inferior … banding together to overthrow elite rule."

"The Purifying Knife" is passionate, macabre and a book you will find yourself going back to over and over again. Each page is filled with an endless stream of citations that would make someone interested in doing their own deep dive into this subject weep with joy. At the same time, the prose itself keeps you hooked throughout the entire book. You would have never guessed it took over a decade to write this book — but a lawsuit, a global pandemic and a firing nestled inside that time all prolonged the process. The Retrograde interviewed both authors on their work with this book.

Phillips and Friauf tracked eugenics' rise in Texas from better baby contests at the State Fair — where 500 babies were measured and judged like livestock for a blue ribbon — to its prevalence in the halls of UT Austin, UT Arlington and Rice University. You can feel Phillips and Friauf's shock at the fact that their own alma maters, UT Austin and Arlington, served as focal points within the Texas eugenics movement. Their book, however, centers on a profound historical mystery: despite overwhelming support from politicians, academics and media, Texas was one of the few states that never passed a eugenic sterilization law.

While forced sterilization programs in states like California and Virginia are well-documented, Phillips and Friauf's research fills a critical void. How could it be that in a state known for its racial violence, did this powerful, racist scientific movement fail to enact its most extreme legislation?

The answer, they discovered, was not a rejection of racism, but a collision of competing prejudices and power structures. The authors explain that a major reason for this was that wealthy landowners, reliant on Mexican labor, clashed with eugenicists who hated immigration. In this case, "greed beat racism," revealing a battle between racists rather than a victory over racism itself.

But "The Purifying Knife" argues that the defeat of sterilization laws was not the end of eugenic thinking. The ideology simply rebranded, persisting in new forms long after World War II.

"The eugenics movement went to a new phase," Friauf said. "They rebranded it advocating not for [forced] sterilization, but 'voluntary sterilization' where doctors would ... bully women into having these sterilizations."

Phillips and Friauf said that, today, modern eugenicists are out in full force with popular alt-right media figures working to normalize ideas like white supremacy while billionaires like Elon Musk and Peter Thiel who pursue transhumanist breeding projects are securing more control over the government. The fear of "inferior" populations documented in this book is something the authors say never went away.

> "We're recreating the same bad, toxic academic environment that allowed eugenics to thrive and suppressing the voices that dare to stand against it"
>
> **— Michael Phillips**

"We have public figures like JD Vance promoting what's called natalism," Friauf said. "And Elon Musk is pretty explicit as a eugenicist; he advances the great replacement theory which is repackaged eugenics, and Trump said immigrants are 'poisoning the blood of America.' They are quite open about it today."

Eugenics also isn't simply a national issue; the elite of Texas continue to support it, according to Phillips. Texan industry moguls like Harlan Crow fund programs across the state which hire white supremacists that explicitly call for sterilization.

"The modern example that's really hair-raising is Harlan Crow," Phillips said. "He has funded something called the Salem [Center] at UT Austin [which] hired a man [who] was saying, 'we really need to bring back this idea of sterilization.'"

The persistence of eugenicist thinking and difficulties in revealing its past as Phillips and Friauf document in their book is not merely historical; it manifested in their own decade-long struggle to bring this story to light. Friauf said that they faced regular delays as a result of their day jobs, the pandemic and the secrecy, which Phillips had to maintain around the project because of an unsupportive university administration.

"Michael had to basically hide what he was doing from his college for a variety of reasons, reasons which culminated in his firing from Collin College," Friauf said.

Phillips was fired from Collin College in May 2022 after confrontations over his anti-Confederate speech and support of masking during the pandemic. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, a national free speech watchdog organization, sued on behalf of Phillips during a time in which they considered Collin the "epicenter of censorship" in Texas. FIRE attorney Katlyn Patton said she was baffled by the school's willingness to blatantly violate the First Amendment.

"How many more lawsuits will it take, and how many more payouts will taxpayers have to shoulder, before Collin College leaders realize that the Constitution applies to them too?" Patton said.

A jury ultimately ruled against Phillips. Phillips said that this was one of the most difficult times in his life, further complicating the research process as university support for research suddenly disappeared. Phillips and Friauf said that their struggles for free speech in Texas, though draining, would not deter them from their work.

Phillips said that as the dust of the lawsuit was settling, he received a surprising call from Andrew Graybill, the director of the Clements Center for Southwest Studies at Southern Methodist University. Graybill told Phillips that he had heard of his ordeal and wanted to support the book project. Friauf said that this is how Phillps received his senior research fellowship at the Clements Research Center, which finally allowed Phillips the chance to return to the creation of the book and to continue travelling across the country to unearth the history displayed in his book. Phillips said that there were alarming parallels between his own firing and the academic environment in Texas that he and Friauf found in their research.

"One reason it took so long for this backlash to eugenics to occur is scientists from that era ... worked in an environment with no diversity, no equity, no inclusion," Phillips said. "We are speeding back towards those times with recent legislation in the state. We're recreating the same bad, toxic academic environment that allowed eugenics to thrive and suppressing the voices that dare to stand against it."

Those interested in the history of Texas, eugenics, discrimination and its modern manifestations will have an excellent time with this book. Eugenics isn't simply some skeleton in the closet: Phillips and Friauf show that now more than ever we need to be familiar with the history of this "science gone wrong" which has started to reemerge.

ERIN GUTSCHKE | RETROGRADE STAFF

Editorial

The Retrograde isn't the only campus paper facing censorship. Meet the Indiana Daily Student.

Indiana University administrators demanded their student newspaper not publish any news at all amid a nationwide crackdown on student expression. *The Retrograde* stands with the IDS.

A year ago, the staff of former student newspaper *The Mercury* were fired en masse for daring to stand up for journalism and free speech at UTD. Indiana University's administrators have joined the newspaper-killing parade, proving that the assault on student press isn't an isolated incident but a national trend.

Mere days before the *Indiana Daily Student*'s 158th print edition was set to publish, university administrators informed the paper's faculty adviser, Jim Rodenbush, that this newspaper should contain no news — a strange and illegal request. The order came from IU's Media School: the October edition must contain "nothing but information about homecoming." Officials stressed this was "an expectation, not a suggestion."

To his credit, Rodenbush refused. He reminded media school dean David Tolchinsky that "any type of attempt on my end to censor or manipulate any content from a student media outlet is literally against the law."

Unfortunately, integrity is often a liability for those employed under administrators who are more interested in controlling the narrative than upholding the law. On Oct. 14, Rodenbush was fired and barred from future rehire in the IU system because he had failed to "work in alignment with the University's direction for the Student Media Plan."

"Student Media Plan" is a pretty euphemism to refer to censorship, which is unquestionably what is happening when a school's administration tells a student-run newspaper what it can and cannot print. When the IDS reached out to administrators for clarification, IU responded by announcing that the IDS would no longer be appearing in print, making it an online-only publication one day after firing the adviser and a week after issuing the "no news in print" order.

INDIANA DAILY STUDENT | COURTESY

Within 48 hours, the IDS went from one of the most decorated student newspapers in the country to a war-torn battleground left with no print and no adviser. Just as UTD did when justifying removing *The Mercury*'s Editor-in-Chief and later firing all its staff, IU will try to justify this any way it can, citing budget constraints or their media plan or saying it's a move to prepare students for "digital-first careers."

Whatever way the school tries to spin it, the facts remain and they paint a clear picture. It is not lost on us that this blatant act of censorship follows closely on the heels of the one-year birthday of our very own independent student newspaper, born out of its own battle with administrative censorship.

In our lifespan, *The Retrograde* has been steadfast in its commitment to a free student press. We just received a preliminary injunction against the enforcement of the

> "These challenges breed successful student journalists — who also know how to get scrappy and win fights against their own schools."

UT System's blatantly unconstitutional attempt to institute a bedtime for the First Amendment. We have signed onto an amicus brief in support of *The Stanford Daily*'s federal lawsuit against Secretary of State Marco Rubio's attempts to revoke international students' visas and deport them for constitutionally protected speech. We have provided advice to other student publications battling censorship across the country, and this past Saturday, we received the Student Press Law Center's Reveille Seven Courage in Student Media Award.

Because of governmental attacks on free speech, the *Stanford Daily* has seen a "dramatic decrease" in the number of international students willing to speak on the record, now avoiding interviews or requesting anonymity. International staff members have left the newspaper entirely, with others excusing themselves from coverage related to political events on campus and asking for their old articles to be scrubbed from the web.

They aren't alone in their fear. We have heard the exact same concerns from international students on our campus. We have received article takedown requests not just for Retrograde articles but for decades-old Mercury articles, and our international staff have requested they be anonymous in their own award-winning work. Across the country, student newsrooms are feeling the noose tightening, which is exactly why *The Retrograde* has joined with organizations like the Student Press Law Center and the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression to stand against this tide of intimidation and suppression.

Our goal is a free student press that's willing and able to publish the truth. It's disheartening that this remains an uphill battle. A university campus is supposed to encourage the development of the very skills that make good journalists, and more importantly, good citizens. Ironically, the challenges of censorship often breed more dedicated, knowledgeable and successful student journalists — who also know how to get scrappy and win fights against their own schools. Through their numerous attempts to stifle students' free expression, institutions like IU and UTD cultivate independent thinking and action within us and our peers, thus ensuring we keep publishing award-winning, provocative, necessary student journalism despite the best efforts of our administrators.

Our commitment to this is unwavering. Nationwide attempts to silence and suppress student voices have yet to slow down, but one of the many benefits of independent nonprofit journalism is that we can continue to lend our voice to this cause without a student media office breathing down our necks about it. The editors at IDS put it best in their editorial regarding the print-issue slash: as long as universities disregard the law, "we're waiting to come to the table. We will continue to resist."

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The Compact for Academic Excellence: a wolf in colorblind clothing

Trump's compact to universities is a cynical attack on higher education dressed in the guise of reform and funding

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

Two years after the Supreme Court struck down Affirmative Action, a new political project is underway to finish the job — not by banning racial consideration in college admissions, but by making it legally toxic to even think about a student's background. The so-called "college compact" now championed by the Trump administration isn't some good-faith reform meant to fix the problems of academia, which any UTD student would know there are plenty of; it's a hostile takeover of higher education disguised as a supposed plea for fairness and neutrality in exchange for favorable funding. Its sweeping provisions, framed in the soothing language of "non-discrimination," "equality" and "neutrality," are designed to systemically dismantle every tool universities have to promote equal opportunity if they are dumb or desperate enough to accept the compact. Based on UTD administration's prior decision making, I worry they might fall into the former category.

Supporters of the compact like Apollo Global Management Executive Marc Rowan argue the compact is the perfect panacea for American scholars — it is a more prudent investment of taxpayer dollars, a return to merit-based selection, a deterrent to grade inflation and a rebirth of transparency for students. The vague notions of viewpoint diversity and nondiscrimination espoused in the compact and Rowan's writings may at first glance sound nice, but let's be completely clear: this opens the door for segregation via litigation and censorship by procedure.

The core mechanism outlined in section one of the compact, "Equality in Admissions," says it seeks to eliminate discriminatory admissions processes by ensuring that no factor such as "sex, ethnicity, race, nationality, political views, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious associations or proxies for any of those shall be considered." This section doesn't simply ban a holistic interpretation of university applicants, it bans the use of any "proxy" for it. This single, deliberately vague word is the trapdoor that will swallow any remaining pathways for marginalized students.

DEBORAH LUO | RETROGRADE STAFF

Like any good bureaucrat with a destructive goal, the compact's architects understand that you don't need to ban a practice outright; you just need to make it so legally perilous that universities abandon it out of fear. Consider the impossible choice the compact creates: if a university considers a student's experience overcoming poverty or being the first in their family to attend college, it can be sued on the grounds that these factors are "proxies" for race. When given the choice between abandoning holistic review or dealing with endless frivolous lawsuits, a risk-adverse administration is nearly guaranteed to abandon its potential marginalized students in the name of risk management.

The compact not only expects this overcorrection but demands it by requiring that university "admissions decisions shall be based upon and evaluated against objective criteria." In this instance, the Trump administration sees objective criteria as standardized tests and GPAs, which would then be made available to the general public. Organizations like the National Education Association and National Education Policy Center have emphasized for years that standardized testing is not an objective measure of a student's ability or intelligence, and that the format as a whole has failed students at large. Researchers have found that wealthy students, who were typically from white families, scored disproportionately better on the SAT than their low-income peers. There is a reason an overwhelming majority of U.S. universities are test-optional, and by making scores public, universities are again opened up for litigation on the grounds that someone was unfairly denied when people with lower scores are admitted despite the different circumstances of each applicant.

This is the breathtaking cynicism of the compact. It uses the threat of legal harassment to force universities to adopt an admissions process that overwhelmingly advantages the wealthy — the very students who can afford tutors, test prep and the stable home environments that produce high GPAs — all while claiming to promote "fairness." The result won't be a level playing field; it will be a sharp decline in enrollment of students from marginalized backgrounds, effectively re-segregating our most selective institutions under the banner of colorblindness.

This death by a thousand bureaucratic cuts doesn't stop at admissions. The compact's support of the "marketplace of ideas" is a smokescreen for an ideological purge. The demand for a "broad spectrum of ideological viewpoints" sounds reasonable until you realize it's a demand to teach Holocaust denial as a legitimate counterpart to Holocaust history, or to present slavery as a debate with two valid sides. This isn't intellectual diversity; it's an attack on evidence-based scholarship itself, conflating political balance with academic rigor. And wielding the compact's financial provisions, critics can now demand the defunding of history departments that "fail" to teach the "other side" of the Holocaust, or ethnic studies programs that are deemed ideologically non-compliant.

Meanwhile, the call for bolstered "institutional neutrality" is an attempt to gag universities from acknowledging simple facts. How do you teach public health without taking a position on vaccines? How do you teach history without taking a position on the wrongs of slavery? How is sending in riot police to violently disperse and arrest 21 UTD students, faculty and alumni neutral because of their political expression? The answer, of course, is that you can't. This "neutrality" is just forced silence on matters where powerful interests would prefer universities not comment — a silence that then disappears the moment the university needs to quash any dissent the state deems inappropriate. It's a policy designed to create a university that stands for nothing, challenges no power and comforts the already comfortable.

To read the rest of this story, visit retrogradenews.com.